



FOLK ART OF BENGAL



Painted wooden
female doll,
Birbhum



Painted wooden
female doll,
Hooghly



FOLK ART OF BENGAL

*a study of an art
for, and of, the people*

BY
AJIT MOOKERJEE

With a Foreword by
SIR WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN



UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

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TO
DR. SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE



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FOREWORD

THE subject of folk art is one of great importance, and Ajit Mookerjee's contribution is very much to the point. Such a work, a promising introduction to a study of folk art parallel to that which my old friend Dinesh Chandra Sen has carried out so admirably for the Bengali folk songs, should lead to further local research. Mr. Mookerjee's pioneer work will no doubt stimulate others to discover and publish local examples of this peasant art, so admirable in its naive presentment of story, image, so powerful and resourceful in fanciful design.

Such discovery, alas, is but a second best. The best would be that this vital creative and spiritual impetus should have continued among the Indian peasantry. Something has happened to chill this activity throughout the world. We may have to wait decades for the re-emergence of a living popular art; meanwhile it is right that we should value and preserve every garment woven for the ingenious spirit of man. Such a work as that of Mr. Mookerjee will increase our respect for the genius of the peasant hand and mind.

WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN

FAR OAKRIDGE
GLOUCESTERSHIRE



PREFACE

CONFINED from early childhood in a world where ones mind hears and reads plain things in a plain way, where first things must come first, one dwells in that only real world, unprejudiced and unsophisticated.

In this rural society of realism, I learn from my grandmother that her crockery no less than her dolls and toys add to the beauty of life, and are in no sense apart from it. In her dialectic, the sun shines in the day and the stars twinkle in the night—the gods and goddesses that have come down from their pedestals never go upward.

This element of human thought has kept alive the folk tradition in Bengal and it is a negligible question whether this culture is intelligible to the bourgeois world or not. It is the product of the rural millions, the roots reaching deep into the soil and it does not require any force to assert that it will continue to exist for untold generations until the tradition as a whole disappears.

A. M.



Chapter One

INTRODUCTORY

What the race lives by is its traditions, its power of embodying the first emanation of its spirit and flesh in forms of undying beauty and aspiration which are never twice the same. It is these traditions which are the immortal joy of mankind, and in their destruction the race is far more hopelessly impoverished than in the destruction of any number of human beings; for it is by his traditions that Man is Man, and not by the number of meaningless superfluous millions whom he spawns over the earth—Havelock Ellis

I. ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHICALLY, the province of Bengal extends from the foot of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, and from Chotanagpur to the frontiers of Assam and Burma.¹ The vast plains comprising twenty-eight districts and two states of Bengal proper, with Singhbhum, Manbhum and Purnea in the west, and Sylhet, Dhubri and Goalpara in the east, indicate a linguistic homogeneity. The present study relates mainly to this geographical unit, which depends, for its life and prosperity, on a network of rivers and canals. The river Ganges (Padma) with its branch the Bhagirathi, and the Brahmaputra and the Meghna divide the country into four principal tracts. The mighty rivers with their numerous tributaries pour down, as they approach the sea, depositing masses of mud and silt, forming deltaic lands which gradually become fit for the plough. The low districts and the Sundarban areas are typical examples. They consist largely of



swampy regions where the people live a semi-amphibious life. These regions are sometimes swept by tidal waves and flood which overwhelm the villages with their people, cattle and crops.

These physical causes have led to various developments. The silt brought by the rivers during the rains collect in the fields. This soil is plentiful and is found generally over the plains. It possesses qualities ideal for pottery-making, doll- and toy-making. The fertility of Bengal soil owes much to this periodical flooding of the rivers. Both the rich alluvium as well as an abundant rainfall in summer explains the phenomenal agricultural productivity and the high density of population. Bengal agriculture depending upon the bounties of nature has created a hierarchy of nature deities in the folk mind. Thus inevitably follow invocations for rain, worship of rivers, worship of earth and harvest. In order to guard against drought, disease and other natural calamities, various minor deities or godlings such as Śitalā, Manasā and Śaṣṭhi have been evolved. This process of anthropomorphisation is carried on still further as the need arises.

The deltaic position of Bengal has contributed to the development of certain special crafts as boat-building and fishing, each having a unique character of its own. In connection with these crafts and activities, various ceremonies and maritime deities² and folk songs such as *Sāri* and *Bhātīāl* have been evolved in the folk mind.

Ease of transport, peculiar to Bengal, has very largely developed the trade and industry. The periodical *melās* (fairs), made possible by commercial contacts, are a traditional feature of rural Bengal. These *melās* are spontaneous and provide a meeting ground for peoples from different parts of the country, giving them an ideal opportunity for exhibiting folk entertainments as well as their traditional arts and crafts. The '*stri-āchāra*' of the womenfolk is a traditional rural custom to encourage young and old to participate in different gatherings, ceremonies and festivals. The community spirit is further strengthened



when men and women of different villages gather at a common meeting ground known as '*Bārowāri-talā*.'

In this manner, the close social and economic intercourse between the different parts of the country has been maintained and furthered. Folk arts and crafts of Bengal have always shared a community of interests, never condemned to isolation and mutual exclusiveness.

2. SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN FOLK ART

Many old racial strains have contributed to the formation of the modern Bengali race. The Bengali speech, although largely influenced by Sanskrit, is of pre-Aryan origin. Chatterji says³: "There are, again, unmistakably Dravidian affinities in Bengali phonetics morphology, syntax and vocabulary"; and concludes that "an investigation of the place names in Bengal, as in other parts of Aryan India, is sure to reveal the presence of non-Aryan speakers, mostly Dravidian, all over the land before the establishment of the Aryan tongue." In the social and religious life of the people, moreover, "they are quite content to leave their neophytes in the undisturbed possession of their old pantheon, and there is nothing to prevent them from worshipping in their own way, with their own priests, their own peculiar gods and devils in addition to the Hindu gods at whose worship none but the Brahmanas can officiate. It thus happens that all the lower and many even of the more respectable castes reverence numerous minor deities, who have appropriately been dubbed godlings, who are quite unknown to Vedic Hinduism."⁴

Bengal has thus inherited a pre-Aryan culture which, we shall subsequently show, is reflected in the art of the folk. At a later stage the Bengali people came under the influence of Aryan culture. Chatterji says⁵: "The pre-Aryan peoples of Bengal began to be influenced by the Aryan (or Upper Gangetic) culture and language immediately after Mithila and Magadha were Aryanised.



This may have taken place before 600 B.C. But for a long time, Bengal remained outside the pale of Aryandom; and it is hardly likely that there was anything like an appreciable Aryanisation east of Mithilā and Magadha and Aṅga before the time of Buddha. The Mahābhārata (200 B.C.—200 A.C. in its present form) mentions Bengal, no doubt, but there is nothing to show it was part of Aryan India when the original or even the received Mahābhārata was compiled."

Folk beliefs and tradition of Bengal have thus a continuous history and have grown through the racial elements in Bengali life and extraneous influences. Dutt⁶ truly observes that "it was an art of the simple people inhabiting rural Bengal, where a sturdy spirit of democracy had been nurtured from the earliest possible times, . . . which had never been completely dominated or suppressed by external imperial and priestly influences. Whenever any outside influences came in its way, this sturdy culture assimilated as much of them as was in harmony with itself without losing its own basic character."

The effect of this assimilation of new cultural elements has provided a complex of established customs and beliefs which marks the operation of constructive social tendency. By the influence of these, the incoming new elements are sublimated into the old cultural pattern, and the old is widened into fresh and often striking ways. This blending of different cultural traits in Bengali life and thought resolves itself as distinctive 'cultural patterns.' The constructive and conserving tendencies of the Bengali people are due to the instinctive response of what Bartlett⁷ calls 'primitive comradeship.' Different sects and beliefs have co-existed throughout Bengali traditional life. These range from the Śakti cult, the Paurāṇic Hinduism down to popular beliefs and folk-Buddhism on their common Tāntric foundation. The influence of folk-Buddhism and the rise of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal marked a great departure in the religious outlook of the Bengali people. This is a period of constant revolt against the conventional fetters of



social and religious ideas. Caṇḍīdāsa, the greatest popular exponent of *Vaiṣṇava Padāvalī* songs, declared in the 14th century :

* *Śunahe mānuṣ bhāi*
sabār upare mānuṣ satya tārpar kichu nāi.'

(Listen, O brother man, the Truth of Man is the highest of truths; there is no other truth above it.)

The idea of glorifying humanity exercised a powerful influence over the popular mind. Gods tremble before men and even a woman like Maynāmatī* compels the gods to obey her. The vast folk-literature—*Maynāmatīr Gān*, *Gopīcandrer Gān*, *Mānikcandra Rājār Gān*, and later even *Kavīkaṇṭhan Candi* and *Manasā Maṅgal*—lavishly describes the spirit of living humanity, its joys and sorrows, hatred and quarrels. The *Vaiṣṇava Padāvalis*, the *Bāul* songs, the Eastern Bengal Ballads openly affirm the freedom from social restraints and free self-expression. Embodied in some of the ballads are extremely interesting specimens of 'bāramāsi' poems (poems of twelve months) describing the daily life of men and women. Bengali folk drama, music and dancing, obviously connected with religion, became conscious of their own aesthetic standards and developed according to their own tradition.

3. THREE TYPES

These different tendencies in social and religious life have affected the art of the people. Bengali folk art corresponds to three types :

(1) Ritualistic.—It is used in the service of rites associated with some beliefs and mystical ideas.

(2) Utilitarian.—Social customs demand the object; modes of manufacture and material qualities determine the form.

(3) Individualistic.—It expresses the feelings and emotions of the artist.



Ritualistic art may, again, be classified into three distinct types. In the pre-logical stage, Bengali art could not be clearly separated from nature. In Bengal, innumerable natural stones known as *Śālagrām Śilās* are still worshipped on a par with a sculptured deity. In the second place, geometric representations, having no sympathetic relation with any external form of life, may be seen. They require a minimum of essentials, two or three lines and a circle are sufficient to represent the god Śiva and his consort Durgā or Lakṣmī or a human figure. The third represents the abstract, suggesting but not portraying any specific object. An illustration of purely abstract design of a symbolic kind is *Ālipanā* design. Although not representing a natural object, it certainly does represent an idea or even a succession of ideas. These ideas are often conventional as in the *Vrata Ālipanās* associated with the *Vrata* stories. To take the cult objects of this category, such as *Ṣaṣṭhi*, *Śitalā*, *Manasā* and animals connected with them, they are representations of a more or less summary kind without any naturalistic activity. This may be due to some ulterior motive, either religious or symbolic. These cult objects are pre-Aryan and sometimes go further back to remoter ages. Kramrisch⁹ describes them as 'ageless types and their timed variations.'

Then there are the artistic renderings connected with the technical processes involved in the manufacture of utilitarian objects, including pottery, basketry, cane works, textiles, dolls and toys. In spite of local differences, however, these objects are mainly variations of the same theme. Owing to active commercial intercourse, these find their way about the country and are treasured possessions in many distant homes.

The individualistic traits have been well illustrated in the paintings and drawings of the *Patuās* (painters) of western Bengal, also in the *Kānthās* of the Bengali women. These *Patuās* are hereditary painters, having inherited their skill from their forefathers. They compose their own songs known as '*Patuā-Sangit*' and depict



them on paper-faced cotton scrolls. Both epics and folk literature furnish the materials for these verses. On the other hand the theme of the *Kālighat Patuās* deals with everyday life—family scenes, animal life, social satire, etc. The motive behind all these paintings and drawings is partly traditional and partly individualistic, *i.e.*, depending on the genius and skill of the particular painter.

Kānthās (embroidered wraps), however, are made by women of all classes in Bengal. They take from six months to three generations to make a *Kānthā*. "No commercial incentive accelerates or vitiates the process of making a whole out of discarded, worthless bits ; they are joined and reinforced by innumerable small stitches which give to the ground with its figure a new life and an ageless meaning."¹⁰ The colour scheme, the distribution of characters and the style vary from *Kānthā* to *Kānthā*. When spread out, a *Kānthā* shows its full beauty, revealing the artist's depth of imagination, taste and skill. It is a treasured possession in every home.

4. SYMBOLISM

It is not easy to find a satisfactory interpretation of the meaning of motif, as the same motif may be interpreted in different ways, and the same idea embodied in different forms. The symbolic content of the design may not always be obvious to the artist and often the meaning does not emerge at once. Objects or drawings, although meaningless in any one place, may have a very definite meaning in a different place. There is no difference between the 'ageless types' of figures, human or animal, whether they are worshipped or played with. Objects like *Śaṣṭhi*, mother and child, horses and *Ghaṭas* (earthen pots) are used as toys by the children and once they are consecrated, they become religious objects. Similarly, an *Ālipanā* drawing, when done by women on festive occasions in execution of certain vows (*Vrata*), is full of sacred significance, but



when drawn on a '*piḍi*'—a wooden seat for the use of bride and bridegroom—is without any significance. A *Vrata-Ālipanā* forming the basis of the ritual, loses its significance and sanctity immediately the ceremony is over. It is a *pièce d'occasion*. The motive may or may not necessarily be symbolic, or the result of a religious impulse.

The principal motifs of the ritual drawings may now be considered. For the *Kumārī-Vrata* (the *Vrata* of virgins), *Tārā-Vrata Ālipanā* is the most popular. It represents the radiant sun flanked by Śiva-Durgā motif, the moon and in between the sun and the moon the universe with sixteen stars. Below the moon, the earth represents the seat of the devotee. The drawing begins from a point, a *Bindu*, building up from there the petals of the lotus and then the sixteen stars are circumscribed by a circle known as *Maṇḍala*, the universe. *Bindu* or *Śūnya* is an important component of Bengali folk drawings. The mystery of creation is centred round *Bindu*. Its origin can be traced to the Vedic age (1500 B.C.). The Bengali *Śūnya Purāṇ* written by Rāmāi Paṇḍit in the 12th century also gives a vivid description of the origin of creation.

From the *Śūnya* (the void) springs the central lotus. It is not the natural lotus but a symbolic representation of cosmic manifestation. On the summit of the *Maṇḍala* are the two figures of Śiva-Durgā, i.e., the supreme Śiva-Śakti, Power-holder of the universe. Śiva is the masculine unchanging aspect of Divinity, while Śakti is the changing feminine aspect, the source of all divine and cosmic evolution. This idea of creation is further to be seen in the union of Śiva-Śakti known as *Śiva-līṅgam*. The development of the Śakti cult, denoting the reception into the Brahmanical system of the aboriginal worship of feminine divinities, can nowhere be studied better than in Bengal. It is here that the goddess, in one of her most destructive forms, is worshipped as Kālī.

The *Ālipanā* of the circular type lavishly illustrates scrolls and spirals. They symbolise *Kālacakra* a cycle of time and



also *Kulaṅḍalini*, the serpent, power of darkness, standing for primordial unity. The earth is also represented in concentric circles. According to the ancient Hindus, everything was in a state of ceaseless activity; hence the world is called *Jagat*, an object in movement. Again, the Earth (*bhū*) is the substance, the primeval plastic material, the concrete representation of '*prakṛti*,' universal substance. Earth, the great mother, is frequently represented as *Ṣaṭhi* and clay figures of the goddess in this aspect have been made from time immemorial. Her other names are: *Aditi*, *Śrī*, *Mahāmāi*. Even the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas have acknowledged her power as the sustainer and supporter of the great womb of all creation. Images of the Great Mother (*Mahāmāyī*), *Manasā* and *Śitalā*, are found in all ancient cities, and are still made by the women and potters in the villages. *Manasā*, the serpent goddess, is worshipped in Bengal both anthropomorphically and emblematically. '*Manas*' signifies the power of the mind and the goddess *Manasā* symbolises this attribute. *Manasā* is never represented as a serpent herself. As the serpent goddess she holds supreme sway over the terrific powers of the serpent, both beneficial and malign.

5. ARCHÆOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Some forms and motifs bear a close resemblance to those of the ancient arts of Western Asia and the Indus Valley. Dutt shows how certain types of Bengali dolls and toys are exactly similar to those found in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (c. 4500 B.C.). The *Āśā-Dāṇḍā* or Metal Disc standard, used in Bengal as the standard of the *Gāzi* cult and also found in the Śaiva and Viṣṇu temples, "has been originally derived from that of the standard of the unicorn of the proto-Indian civilisation of the Indus valley."¹¹

The survival of the unicorn tradition in Bengal is established by the evidence furnished by two old traditional scroll-paintings



recently discovered by me in Western Bengal, now in the collection of G. S. Dutt. He has also discussed another striking similarity between the traditional form of the goddess Śrī, Lakṣmī or Kamale-Kāminī (The Lady in the Lotus) with that of the figurine reproduced in Pl. XXII of Marshall's Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilisation, Vol. I.

A similar opinion has been expressed by Coomaraswamy that the folk arts that survive in Bengal are directly descended from the Indus Civilisation of at least 5,000 years ago.¹²

Technically and even artistically there are very strong reasons for claiming a direct relationship of the Mohenjo-Daro civilisation and perhaps that of the Mesopotemian civilisation, with many of the forms and motifs of Bengali folk art.



Chapter Two

KĀNTHĀS (EMBROIDERED WORKS)

1. PREPARATION

KĀNTHĀS are generally made by the women of all classes in Bengal, but chiefly in Eastern Bengal. The word *Kānthā* means embroidered work made mostly on discarded saris which are sewn together almost invisibly. Discarded saris, according to the size and thickness required are arranged one on top of the other until the desired thickness is obtained and the edges folded in. They are first tacked loosely round the edges. The field is then filled in with fine quilting work by means of white thread. Coloured threads from the borders of saris are stitched along the border line and the surface is filled in with various designs.

Generally speaking, the embroideries in the *Kānthās* have a 'dorokhā' or obverse and reverse character. Ordinarily the designs appear distinctly on the obverse face. In the most finished types of *Kānthās*, however, the stitches are so skilfully made that the details of each design appear in identical forms and colours on either face of the *Kānthā*. Indeed, it is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the obverse face from the reverse face.

2. METHOD OF CARRYING OUT THE EMBROIDERY

It is necessary to trace the design before the quilting is made, as this only forms the background. Where the linen shows in the design this is usually unquilted and held in place by embroidery stitches.



The chief stitches used are darning, satin stitch, loop stitch and for the outlines, stem and split stitches are used.

The *Kānthās* are made in both large and small sizes, from small squares to large rectangles.

3. SEVEN TYPES

The following are the different types of *Kānthās* :

(1) *Lep* : wrap for the body and worn in winter. This is about six by four feet; and thickly quilted.

(2) *Sujni* : a ceremonial *Kānthā* and also used as a bed-spread. *Sujni Kānthās* are usually large and rectangular in shape. The average size is six by three feet.

(3) *Baytan* : wrap for books and valuables of all kinds. It is usually square shaped, being approximately three square feet in size. It has a wide border of several rows of human or animal design. In the centre there is usually a design of a lotus in concentric form round which is grouped a multiplicity of various designs of familiar objects. In the four corners there are *Kalkās* (decorative leaves or else conventional trees, or lotuses).

(4) *Oār* : pillow cover. It is rectangular and the size is two feet long by one foot and a half wide. It is generally of a very simple design which may either be a number of parallel longitudinal border patterns or conventional trees with birds. There is always an extra decorative border sewn round the edges.

(5) *Ārsilatā* : wrap for mirrors and combs. It is narrow and rectangular in shape, the size being about eleven by six inches. Creepers, lotuses or trees generally form the subject matter of the design.

(6) *Durjani*, *Thaliā* : wallet cover. A square piece of cloth is embroidered with a border and a lotus in the centre. To make a wallet, three of the corners are folded inwards, so that their apices



meet at the centre. The edges are then sewn together. A string is attached to the loose upper end and wound round the wallet to fasten it.

(7) *Rumāl*: handkerchief. It is small and square in shape. The design of 'Kānthā' handkerchief is usually a central lotus round which is grouped a variety of motifs.

Some of the ritual designs on *Kānthās*—particularly *Maṇḍala* and *Kalasa* designs—are frequently to be seen. These designs are also executed by women only on festive occasions in fulfilment of certain vows (*Vrata-Ālipanā*). The form of the *Maṇḍala* design in the *Kānthā* is of particular interest. The centre of the *Maṇḍala* is almost invariably filled in with the 'Satadala padma' or hundred-petalled lotus. The petals are not always exactly one hundred in number but are made as numerous as possible, so as to suggest a hundred-petalled lotus. This design is surrounded by several concentric rings of thread work. They are always different from one another. The entire design is then circumscribed by radiating *Kalāsas* (pot-design) and sometimes by *Saṅkhas* (conch-shell design).

4. INFLUENCE OF TEXTILE PATTERN

Another style of *Kānthā* has a border with repeating design, similar to that sewn on saris. These *Kānthās* are embroidered by women of the weaver class and the designs are clearly inspired by the older craft. The pattern is chiefly carried out in darning stitch which gives an effect similar to weaving. When the stitch is of considerable length, it is broken one or more times by making a short stitch on the reverse. This gives a characteristic dotted appearance. The result of the above technique is that while *Kānthās* of the former type have a 'dorokhā' character, in the latter the forms and designs which appear on one face are complementary to those on the other and the right face is easily distinguished from the reverse face.



The repetition of designs, either in a linear or in a circular arrangement, gives an appearance or regimentation in *Kānthās* of this style, which is entirely absent in '*dorokhā*' *Kānthās*, where the object is to make each design different from the others.

5. APPLIQUE WORK

Appliqué work is of great importance in connection with embroidery on *Kānthās* and deserves special mention. It is principally worked in two ways—either in broad masses, such as can be seen on flags (*Patākā*) and canopies (*Candrātap*). A lion or a lotus motif, for example, is first cut out in red cloth and then placed on a white background and stitched round the edge.

According to the second process, a piece of cloth is cut up into narrow strips and used as ribbon round the design. The latter method is used with great effect for pillow-cases and actors' costumes. A good illustration of this type of work is a pillow-case worked in white cloth and decorated with red and blue ribbon appliqué. The strips of cotton are hemmed on each side of the case with the raw edges turned in.

Although infinite labour is entailed in this process, the decorative effect well repays the work done. The front and the back as well as the two sides of the pillow-case have a conventional design of a geometric pattern.

Kānthās are worked by women, each inventing her own design; and it is considered dishonourable to copy another woman's work. Original designs may be perpetuated in each family, mainly by association with the *Kānthās*, but the women are encouraged to cultivate their inventive faculty by using their own original design. None of the preserved *Kānthās* are earlier in date than the early 19th century, and some are the work of more than one generation.



Chapter Three

TEXTILES

FROM the earliest times, the Bengali people have made the art of weaving a speciality. The industry is spread all over the province and almost every village possesses a number of looms. The artisans in general are Hindu *Tantubāyas*, whilst the *Yūgis* (a section of Hindus) and the *Jolās* (a section of Muhammedans) are also a considerable influence. The *Tantubāyas* have specialised in fine weaving while the other two communities weave coarser products.

1. COTTON

There are two cotton crops in Bengal: the early crop, which is sown during the cold weather, and the late crop, which is usually sown at the close of the rainy season and harvested in the hot weather. The chief cottons grown are *Gossypium herbaceum* and *Gossypium neglectum*.

2. DACCA MUSLIN

From the artistic point of view, the Dacca Muslin is the most important of Bengal's woven cotton fabrics. Its extreme fineness was once a wonder to the whole textile world. Watson says¹⁸: "With all our machinery and wondrous appliances, we have hitherto been unable to produce a fabric which for fineness or utility can equal the 'woven-air' of Dacca . . ."



The finest quality of plain Dacca Muslin is called *Saṅgati*, meaning 'for presentation.' *Sarbati* (sweet as sherbet) is the name for another variety. Others of slightly inferior quality are known as *Ābrawān* (running water) and *Sabnam* (evening dew). It is said that *Ābrawān* is so finely woven, that if it were thrown into a stream, it would become invisible in the running water; and the *Sabnam* is said to be so fine that, spread on wet grass in the evening, it will become invisible until the dew has disappeared in the morning.

A speciality of embroidered Dacca Muslin is known as *Kāsida*. It includes all kinds of embroidered muslins used as scarves, handkerchiefs and turbans.

Figured muslin is known as *Jāmdāni*. "The peculiarity of the ordinary *Jāmdāni* is that it is begun as in the case of a piece of ordinary cloth, and a pattern of the embroidery, drawn on paper, is pinned beneath. As the weaving goes on the workman continually raises the proper pattern to ascertain if his woof has approached closely to where any flower or other figure has to be embroidered, when the exact place is reached, he takes his needle (a bamboo splinter), and as each woof thread passes through the intersected portion of it, and so continues until it is completed. When the embroidered pattern is continuous and regular, as in the usual sari border, the weaver, if a skilful workman, usually dispenses with the aid of a paper pattern."¹⁴

Thickly woven textiles are to be found in most villages and are known as *motā-kāpar*. In the hill district of Tippera coarse cloth is also woven in bright stripes: it is called *pācharā* and *reiya*. Some of the coarser cloths are used as towels and bed-sheetings.

3. WEAVING

The tools and appliances used by cotton weavers consist of a spinning wheel (*Charḳā*) and a spindle (*Teḳo* or *Takli*). The cotton is

first separated, and carding follows. A bow-shaped beater known as *Dhun* is used for this purpose. The string of the bow is placed on the cotton and is made to vibrate by means of a wooden hammer. These vibrations disentangle the fibres, cleanse them of all foreign matter, such as seeds, separating the coarser parts from the fine and soft cotton. The latter is then rolled on a stick in the form of a cylinder, approximately half a cubit long and half an inch in diameter. Fastening this to the spindle (*Tekko*), the wheel is turned again and again and the thread gently and carefully drawn out. When the thread is about three hundred yards long, it is taken out of the wheel and rolled on a revolving reel called *Charkhi*. The quantity of thread thus rolled is called a '*feti*' or skein. A '*morā*' consists of 20 such '*fetis*.' The spindle (*takli*) is not much thicker than a stout needle. The spinning by this process is usually done by women under thirty. It is from ten to fourteen inches in length with a small clay spindle-whorl attached to the bottom end. The spinner rests the spindle in the hollow of a shell and revolves it between the thumb and the forefinger of the one hand, spinning the thread from the roll of cotton held in the other. When a quantity of thread has been spun and collected, it is wound on a bamboo reel.

According to the quality of the stuff required 1,000, 1,200, 1,300, 1,800; 2,000, 2,200 or 2,400 threads are warped on the mill. The length of the warps are, as a rule, 50 to 100 yards long. The method of weaving may be best described by referring to an illustration provided by Watson.¹⁵

For bordered saris and *dhutis* and for striped and check fabrics, the threads are arranged according to the required colours. And to secure the 'lease' or plane of separation of the different coloured threads, the smooth bamboo shed-sticks cross the warp at the requisite intervals.

On finishing the weaving, a blunt beater of equal length and breadth called *shipi* or a hard brush is worked to and fro on both



sides of the cloth in order to clean and arrange displaced threads in the cloth.

Satarāñjis are cotton carpets woven with thick threads. Usually they are made with blue and white stripes, but for smaller cloths other colour combinations are common. These are used as bedspreads and seat-coverings.

4. SILK

The silk industry is widespread in Bengal. The alluvial districts in the Ganges Valley are the home of the mulberry tree. Malda, Bogra, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Burdwan have long been famous for their silk. Large quantities of silk fabrics are also manufactured in Bankura and Midnapur. The hill tracts of Western Bengal, chiefly Manbhum and Singbhum are centres of the *Tasar* silk industry, while the *Eri* silk is to be found in the sub-Himalayan regions of North Bengal and Assam. *Korā* is unbleached and unwashed silk, and when washed and bleached it is known as *Garad*. *Dhutis*, *Lungis* (cloths), *Chādars* (sheets) and saris, handkerchiefs, scarves, and gown pieces are the chief woven silk goods of Bengal.

The following is a list of the best class of silk goods :

- (1) Bāluchar saris (figured and embroidered) with *āñchlās* or ornamental end-pieces.
- (2) Shawls with ornamental borders and corners.
- (3) Scarves of the same type as shawls, only much smaller.

Besides these there are striped and check fabrics of various bright colours. No design or ornamental work is usually made on *Tasar* silk.

5. DYEING

" The use of indigenous vegetable dyes is practically extinct in Bengal. In Faridpur a yellow dye was at one time obtained from the



flower of the *ikusum* tree (*schleicheria trijuga*, Willd.), the petals of which were dried and boiled and the solution used for colouring yarn. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts blue dye is still obtained from the indigo plant and a red dye is obtained from the roots of the tree known as *ranggach* (*morinda angustifolia*, Roxb.). The roots are first cut into small pieces and smashed into a pulp. Water, into which ashes of tamarind wood have been added and carefully strained away, is then added to the pulp and the yarn is kept soaked in it for a night. It is placed three or four times into the solution and, before the last dipping, is smeared with vegetable oil. In the Chittagong district a chocolate colour is obtained from the bark of a tree which is cut into chips, left in cold water in a cauldron for four or five days and then boiled for at least a day. A quantity of stick lac, separately boiled in water, is mixed with the decoction of bark. Lime juice and lime are also added and the yarn (generally of silk) is steeped for several hours in the resulting mixture and then dried. The tree used is becoming rare owing to its indiscriminate use as a dye and it has been impossible to identify it, the only name known for it coming through a Bengali transliteration of the Burmese name which is given as *tinyhat*. In Chittagong alum and lemon juice are used to give brilliance to the imported synthetic dyes in which silk yarn is coloured after being boiled with soap, washed in cold water, dried and steeped for 3 to 4 days in cold water. The black colour of *hookā* shells is in some cases said to be natural ; in others it is obtained by burying the shells underground for some days. In some parts it is applied by burning the outer scrapings and applying the ashes or by mustard oil or by a concoction of fried rice powder added to juice extracted from the fruit of the *haritaki* tree (*terminalia chebula*, Retz.) dipped in water with a piece of iron and added to *hīrākash* (sulphate of iron) and cocoanut oil." 18

The colour obtained from the *ol* root is used for stamping cloths in different fancy patterns. The cloths are stamped with wooden moulds of different patterns, mainly floral, geometrical and animal.



Chapter Four

DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS

1. ĀLIPANĀ

DURING the progress of festivities and religious functions, the women of Bengal make *Ālipanā* drawings on mud floors and on courtyards. They are drawn on the ground by means of a small piece of cloth wrapped round a finger, and which has been soaked in thin ground rice paste. These rice-paste drawings are connected with certain rites performed exclusively by matrons (*Nārī-Vrata*) and virgins (*Kumārī-Vrata*) or by priests on behalf of women (*Śāstrīya-Vrata*).

2. VRATAS

Vratas are practical rites for the realisation of special wishes, and performed according to rules transmitted from generation to generation. These are not confined to any religious cult or special sect. The most common wishes of *Vratīs* (women practising the ritual) are for long life, birth of a child, wealth, victory and general well-being. The *Ālipanā* drawings are executed during the performance of these rites.

It is not improbable that powdered rice was originally used for these *Ālipanā* drawings. Perhaps the necessity for using thin ground rice paste first arose when *Ālipanā* drawings were drawn on walls and pillars. The use of the colour—white—is universal, although other colour combinations are permitted, usually for wall-paintings and *Māghmaṇḍal Vrata-Ālipanā*.



3. CIRCULAR ĀLIPANĀ

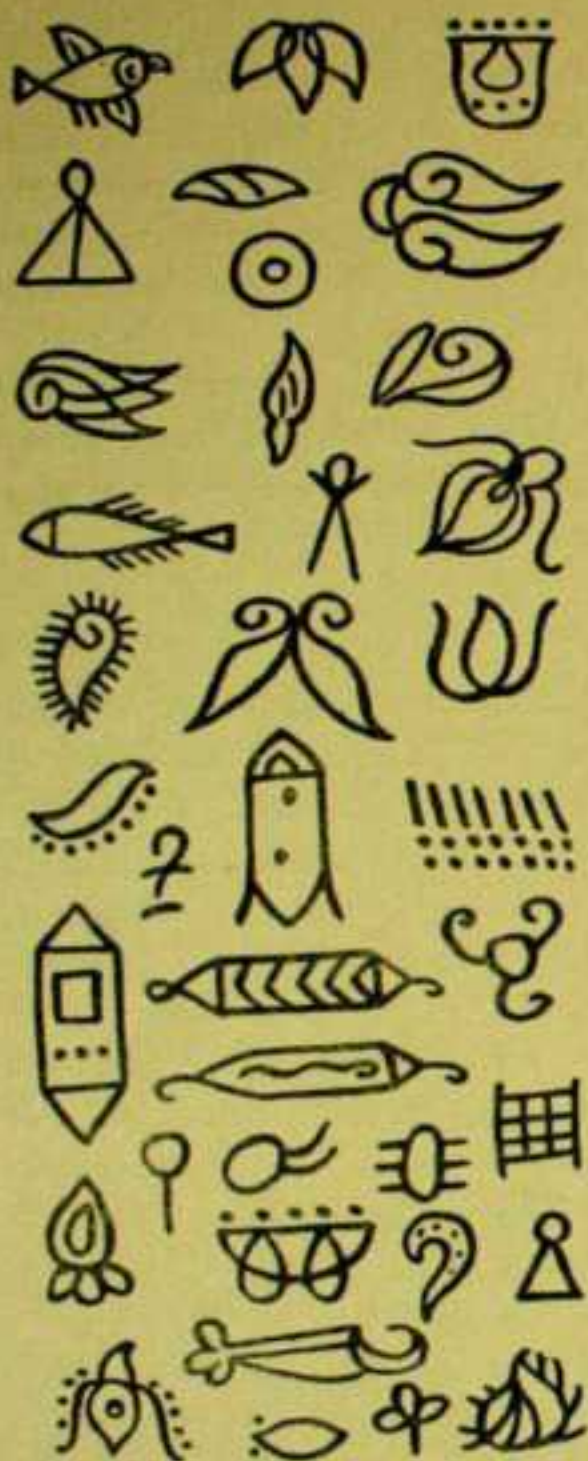
The *Ālipanā* drawing is characterised by the conventional treatment of its designs. Age long forms, motifs, and their combinations have now become conventionalised as shown in the design of the circular *Ālipanā*. A central lotus entwined in creepers singly or jointly, and ending with *Kalasa* (pitcher) motif on the outer edge is the usual arrangement.

In this design, characteristics of the circular *Ālipanā* drawing, a type which may well be termed *Vardhamāna*, has been evolved. This *Ālipanā* drawing always derives its form and shape by the gradual growth of interconnected floral and linear devices.

4. VRATA ĀLIPANĀ

The *Ālipanā* of the *Vrata*-stories is somewhat different, consisting of fragmentary pictures illustrative of stories. The theme of these illustrations are consequently more varied. As a rule, the *Vrata-Ālipanās* are drawn during the winter months by young girls, the *Ālipanā* drawing of *Tārā-Vrata* being the most popular. On each day a different motif is drawn until, on the very last day of the season, all the known motifs are executed together.

Curiously enough, only for the *Ālipanā* drawing of the *Māgh-maṇḍal-Vrata*, another favourite of the country girls, various coloured powders are used. This design usually consists of five concentric circles with representations of the sun and the moon at the top and the bottom. The preparation of this *Ālipanā* drawing is different in that the patterns are cut into the ground. The first circle is filled in with powdered *bel* leaves (green), the second one with pounded turmeric (yellow), the third one with burnt powdered husk (black), the fourth one with powdered brick (red). The sun is filled in with powdered brick and the moon with powdered rice—the one representing the red glow of the sun and the other the mellow white light of the moon.



Some Pictographic Marks in Alipanā Drawings



As an illustration of one of the many *Vrata*-stories a ballad about the country girls current in Eastern Bengal runs: "She (Kajal-*rekha*) kept handfuls (of rice) of a very fine quality—the *shālī*—under water until they were thoroughly softened. Then she washed them carefully and pressed them on a stone. She prepared a white liquid paste with them and first of all she drew the adored feet of her parents who were always uppermost in her mind. She next drew two granaries taking care to paint the footsteps of the harvest goddess in the paths leading to them, and she introduced at intervals fine ears of rice drooping low with their burden. Then she drew the palace of the great god Śiva and his consort Pārvatī in the Kailāsa mountain. In the middle of a big lotus leaf she painted Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī seated together, and on a chariot drawn by the royal swan, she painted the figure of Manasā Devī from whom all the victories proceeded. Then she drew the figures of witches and the Siddhās, who could perform *tāntric* practices and next of the nymphs of heaven. She drew a *Seorā* (*Trophis aspera*) grove and under it the figure of Bana Devī (the sylvan deity). Then she painted Rakṣā Kālī—the Goddess who saves us from all dangers. The warrior-god Kārttikeya and the writer-god Gaṇeśa she drew next with their respective *bāhanas* or animals they rode. And then Rām and Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa were drawn by her admirably. The great chariot Puṣpaka—the aeroplane—was sketched in her drawings and the Gods Yama and Indra were also introduced in this panorama.

She next painted the sea, the sun and the moon, and last of all an old dilapidated temple in the middle of a woodland with the picture of a dead prince inside it. She drew all figures excepting her own. The figures of the Needle-Prince and of his courtiers were all there but not any of her own.

When the painting was finished, she kindled a lamp fed by sacred butter and then she bowed down with her head bent to the ground." "



The scope of the *Vrata-Ālipanā* drawing thus increases according to the theme of the story, but its character remains unaltered owing to its countless repetitions. Undoubtedly these *Ālipanā* drawings are not merely decorative. The elements of the design include conventional flora and fauna, concentric circles in series, spirals or curvilinear devices, short lines in series, foot-prints, ovals, swastikas, or geometrical designs or human and animal figures.

5. HIEROGLYPHS

Some of the forms and motifs found in *Ālipanā* drawings are hieroglyphic in character. These forms and motifs can be traced to pictographic representations of ancient times. Further, there is a strong reason to suspect, as Dr. Malcolm, Curator of the Horniman Museum, points out, that certain leaf-like patterns, arcs, dots, parallel wavy lines, hatched lines, fish and animal motifs have significant resemblance to the tattoo designs practised by the aboriginal tribes of Bengal.

From the study of different kinds of *Ālipanā* drawings, it is evident that repetition and uniformity of motif are fundamental. The symmetrical character of the *Ālipanā* designs predisposes us to suspect that there is a definite survival of forms derived, no doubt, from earlier motifs. Although these *Ālipanā* drawings illustrate the continuity of thought, one cannot omit the religious aspect of the subject. The desire of these simple people express themselves by means of drawings. This desire to propitiate by means of incantations, vows, etc., accompanied by some manifestation in practical form, whether pictorial art, dancing, singing, etc., is by no means uncommon.

6. PAṬA-PAINTINGS

In Bengal, the word *Paṭa* signifies picture painted on cloth or paper. This word as used in the current dialect has developed into *Paṭuā*, meaning a painter.



The earliest *Paṭa*-paintings of Bengal are undoubtedly products of an art practised from very early times in the province. Elaborate directions regarding the preparation and the method of painting are recorded in ancient Sanskrit works such as the *Viṣṇudharmottaram*, *Śilparatnam*, etc., and have been a guide for succeeding generations of Indian artists.

7. SCROLLS

The paintings are in the form of scrolls which exhibit continuous representation, and are shown to the public to the accompaniment of music composed by the artist himself. The second type, especially of the *Kālighāt Paṭuās* are drawn on 'tulā' (hand-made coarse paper), a little larger than a foolscap sheet. The scroll-paintings are so long that it is not possible for a spectator to visualise the whole picture at once, and so the meaning becomes evident only as they are unrolled.

8. PREPARATION

The preparation of the cloth, selected for its even texture and smooth finish is coated with a thin layer of clay paste, carefully pounded and usually mixed with cowdung and water. When dry, the surface of the cloth is rubbed smooth, and it is then ready for painting. Lime or chalk paste on paper-faced cloth is another method of preparing a scroll. The memory image of the figures to be depicted are then painted in appropriate colours and outlined in lampblack or red.

9. COLOURS

Five primary colours—white (*śveta*), yellow (*pita*), lampblack (*kṛṣṇa*), green-brown (*haritāla*), red (*rakta*) are the usual media of the artist. Goldleaf and golddust, silverleaf and silverdust may be also



employed. In the preparation of the paints for use, the seeds of 'teñtul' tree are collected, boiled in hot water and the paints are mixed with the resultant paste. Barley paste may also be used. The artists are adepts in the mixing of these colours which retain their brilliance for long periods. Whatever is regarded as poor or excessive in the drawing is removed with the edge of a bamboo-scraper or by means of white paint.

These pictures usually illustrate mythological stories. The chief characteristic of scroll-paintings is that it contains all the qualities of mural painting. Boldness, vigour and spontaneity are remarkable features of these drawings. The technique of painting the trees is noteworthy. In the symbolic representation of the forest, a few trees only are used in the background.

10. JĀDU-PATUĀ

The scrolls drawn by the *Jādu-Paṭuās* are relatively narrower and smaller. These pictures were originally exhibited to the tribal peoples of Western Bengal and Eastern Bengal, i.e., Sāntāls and Bediyās, respectively. But nowadays, they have become quite familiar to the people in the villages. According to Dutt,¹⁰ "whenever a Sāntāl man, woman or child dies the *Jādu-Paṭuā* appears at the house of the bereaved family with a ready-made sketch of the deceased done from his own imagination. There is no attempt at versimilitude but the picture merely consists of drawings of an adult or child or a male or female according to the age and sex of the deceased. The *Jādu-Paṭuā* presents the picture completely drawn in colour with one omission only, viz., the iris of the eye. He shows the picture to the relatives and tells them that the deceased is wandering about blindly in the other world and will continue to do so until they send gifts or money or some other articles through him, viz., the *Jādu-Paṭuā* himself, so that he can perform the act of *Caḷṣudān* or bestowal of eye-sight. . . . So



the relatives make presents of money or some other articles of domestic use to the *Jādu-Paṭuā* for transmission to the deceased and the *Jādu-Paṭuā* then puts the finishing touch to the picture by performing the act of *Caṅṣudān* or supplying the iris of the eye in the picture of the deceased. It is perhaps from this semi-magical practice the *Jādu-Paṭuā* derives his name (*Jādu*—magic ; *Paṭuā*—painter)."

Further, the *Jādu-Paṭuās* represent the Tiger God, *Gāzi-paṭ*, in their scrolls. Paintings of animals, particularly lions and tigers, take a prominent part in these scroll-paintings. Noble animals are shown full face and ignoble animals in profile. Their paintings are characterised by primitive qualities—vigour, naïveté and directness. When the *Jādu-paṭuās* came into contact with the Bengali folk they drew scenes illustrating the acts of *Kṛṣṇalīlā* and *Rāmlīlā* which they have borrowed from the epic, but their technique is always essentially primitive.

II. KĀLIGHĀT-PATUĀ

In the miniature paintings of the *Kālighāt-Paṭuās*, a greater efficiency in line drawing has been achieved. The first drawing is made with one long bold perfect sweep of the brush. Often the line is made in such a way that it is difficult to say where the artist first touched the paper and where he finished the outline. A drawing like "the sleeping woman" shows an amazing mastery of the brush. The *Kālighāt-Paṭuās* are masters of drawing caricatures and satirical sketches in large numbers dealing with the topics of the day, the happenings in the law courts as well as in the bazaars. Even popular sayings and proverbs are well illustrated by them. Thus the picture has a wonderful mass appeal and mass appreciation.



Chapter Five

POTTERY AND TERRACOTTAS

1. POTTERY

THE chief earthenware used by the common people are food, cooking and drinking vessels. Dolls, toys, fruits, fishes, animals, whistles, and other small objects are frequently made of earthenware. The industry is an ancient one, confined to a class of people called Kumbhakārs or Kumārs who also specialise in making figures of Hindu gods and goddesses. The custom of throwing usable pots away and obtaining new ones instead on prescribed occasions prevails in the country districts, thus maintaining a continuity of tradition and prosperity of the pottery industry.

2. MATERIALS AND THEIR PREPARATIONS

A suitable medium for making pottery is obtained from the banks of rivers or canals and from the silt deposited in the fields. The clay is well moistened with water, and all extraneous substances are carefully removed. Then it is kneaded by hand and in this laborious task the Kumār is very largely helped by his womenfolk and children. His tools and appliances consist mainly of a wooden hand-wheel, a few rods and several flat hammers.

3. WHEEL

The diameter of the whole wheel (*chāk*) is usually rather more than three feet. In the centre is a solid disc of tamarind or some



other hard wood, some thirteen inches in diameter, to which the outer rim is joined by means of four wooden spokes, each of which is six inches in length. The outer rim, which is about six inches wide, is made of bamboo splints, bound with cane and covered with a thick plaster of clay mixed with jute-waste ; the object of this rim is to act as a counterbalance. The wheel is supported on an iron or wooden axis turning in a pivot fixed in the ground. This enables the wheel to revolve freely and reduce the friction to a minimum. The wheel is worked by hand or by means of a bamboo stick (*lāthi*), and revolves horizontally.

4. METHOD OF MANUFACTURE

A moistened and well-kneaded lump of clay is placed on the central disc of the wheel ; and as the wheel revolves, the workman works the mass of clay on the disc. Each vessel, as it is moulded, has to be separated from the rest of the mass of clay, and this is done by drawing a string gently through the clay at the place where it is to be cut, while the wheel is turning at full speed. The vessel is then sun-dried for a couple of days ; and when it is somewhat hardened, it is placed in a hollow mould made of earthenware, which is sprinkled with sand to prevent the vessel from adhering to it and from consequent cracking. A pot is then beaten with a flat wooden or earthenware mallet, held in the right hand, against a smooth, oval-shaped stone held by the left hand on the inner surface. When the required shape has been given to the vessel, it is again sun-dried, and the surface is then polished with an earthenware pestle (*baila*) or cotton fibres folded and moistened with water.

5. HAND-MOULDING

Curiously enough hand-moulding of pottery still survives in Bengal. In the " Evolution of the Domestic Arts " ¹⁹ it is observed :



"In Asia the wheel is predominant, but the earlier methods are not entirely extinct ; relatively little is known of the ancient pottery of Asia, except in parts of the west." To mould the lower part of globular vessels, the clay is gradually beaten into the desired shape and thickness by means of a wooden mallet. Then it is joined with the upper part of a vessel made by the wheel. A slip, generally red or yellow ochre, is then applied to the vessel.

6. BAKING

The baking is done in an open furnace, fired generally by wood, while coal is also used in some parts of Western Bengal. The furnace is a big hole in the ground over which there is a platform of wood and mud under which there is side opening for the fuel. The pots are arranged on the platform in a pile, each set of pots being covered with a layer of straw. Baking continues for six to eight hours and the pots are left three or four days to cool. The pottery varies in shape, some globular and broad and some pear-shaped.

7. DECORATION

The decoration of pottery may be either plastic or pictorial. The plastic ornament consists of indentations, incisions, stamping of the clay pot, or pelleting. The pottery may be decorated with interlocking circles and wavy lines, zig-zag and cross-wise lines. Glazing by covering the product with a resinous varnish, sometimes of contrasting colour, is a late invention.

The bulk of the pottery is coated with red slip but painting with different colours is not unusual. For painting pottery there are two methods. For a class of earthenware called *Sakherhāḍi* (pleasing to look), *Maṅgalghaṭa*—ceremonial pitcher, *Manasāghaṭa*—pitcher symbolising Manasā, the goddess of snakes, and ceremonial plates such as



Lakṣmī-sarās, representing Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, the outside baked surface is decorated with ordinary paints of yellow, red, black and green colours on a white chalk wash; while others are painted with a certain kind of earth called '*bil-māṭi*,' and the colour is burnt in.

8. SMOKING THE WARE

The interior face of a pot is always left untouched and differs from the exterior which is invariably affected not only by firing but also by ornamentation. The most common method of producing a shining black colour is to fire the articles slowly in a closed mound of earth in order to produce a volume of carbon coating the sun-baked pot. A silvery-black colour is produced with an additional mixture of tin and zinc.

The large jars called '*Kolās*' are usually of a plain red or black colour, resembling ordinary unglazed earthenware, the smaller ones appear to be fine polished black. The polish or gloss on the surface of these vessels is not really a glaze, as appears at first sight. On a careful examination of the broken edges of these vessels, no thickness of glaze will be found. The method is to rub the surface of the unbaked pottery with certain seeds or a mucilaginous juice somewhat like gum, thereby producing a polish which remains even after the vessel has been fired. The pottery, on the whole, exhibits a considerable beauty of outline, showing a close affinity in shape and size with the prehistoric remains.

9. TERRACOTTAS

The potters (Kumārs), and women, irrespective of classes make terracotta dolls, toys and idols. The objects are made by two processes—by hand and by casting.



10. HAND-MADE

The hand-made objects are fashioned by pinching, using pellets of clay and working the clay until the desired shape is obtained. Sometimes the eyeballs or the ornaments of the limbs are shown either by punctures or by grooves. These figurines are baked either in slow fire of rice husks or in the sun. In rare instances they are painted. Sometimes sun-baked clay figurines are glazed with lac.

These figurines are usually flat at the back and rounded in the front ; and the arms are extended. The female figures sometimes wear broad girdles ; but are otherwise nude. There is a complete disregard of accuracy of anatomical details. The height of the figurines is three to five inches, never exceeding one foot.

11. CASTING

In this process, casting only is made by the potters. The whole figure or the face only is cast in a mould ; and in the latter case the rest of the body is modelled by hand. The original mould is very ancient and is used from generation to generation. A quantity of clay varying according to the size of the figure is pressed on a mould coated with sand. This coating of sand enables the cast to be withdrawn from the mould. This is then baked in the sun and fired before it is painted. Colouring gives animation to the different poses of the figurines and the treatment of the drapery is especially noteworthy. The droll figures which occasionally come out of the potters' mould show an overwhelming sense of humour. Of the many representations of animals by the potters, the cow and the calf, horses, birds and elephants bear the mark of a very old continuous tradition.

12. CULT OBJECTS

Most of these figurines are used as dolls and toys for children, but from this it is not to be concluded that they necessarily originated



as such. To begin with, some of them must have been used in adult games, gradually becoming children's toys. In some cases the process has been different, the children's toys being originally cult objects. The figurines mother and child, Śitalā, Śaṣṭhī, etc., are some instances of such cult objects. These figurines are very simple in character and represent only the bare outline of human form and are invariably lacking in fingers and toes. The mother and child figurines are the most valued of all the clay dolls and toys in Bengal. Bits of clay are stuck on the figurines to represent necklaces, armlets, girdles and anklets. In some cases, the ornaments and girdles are not denoted by adding additional bands of clay but are merely suggested by a few lines. Most of these figurines including Śaṣṭhī and Śitalā are nude, and some of the sitting mothers are distinctly steatopygous.

13. GODDESS OF FERTILITY

The universal worship of Śaṣṭhī, the goddess of childbirth, still prevails in Bengal and there is no doubt that these nude figurines represent the goddess of fertility. Coomaraswamy²⁰ writes: "We can safely assert that the Indian nude goddess was a goddess of fertility, for this is written unmistakably upon her image, that she was a popular and perhaps the greatest of the many non-Aryan feminine divinities who later on were gradually and only with difficulty merged in the Brahminical and Buddhist pantheons as Śakti, and she is in the last analysis identical with the Great Mother, the Supreme Devis of the Tantras.

14. TOY HORSE

The figures of horses are mounted on two wheels, the axles of which support the front and hind legs respectively. The eyes are represented by flattened clay pellets with a lateral notch in the centre. The upturned tail gives an impression of vivacity and vigour. The



animal and bird figures perform a dual function : not only are they used as toys but it is a widespread custom to dedicate them to some village gods and goddesses and place them at the foot of the Banyan or the Siju (*Euphorbia*) tree, both of which are regarded as sacred.

15. AGE-LONG TRADITION

A most remarkable feature of these clay dolls and toys, particularly of the hand-made mother and child figures and toy-horsecarts, is that in technique, at any rate, they are practically indistinguishable from similar clay figurines found at Mohenjo-Daro. Kramrisch²¹ rightly maintains : "The chronology of Indian terracottas has given rise to much speculation and several conclusions have been drawn from the existence of the various types. 'Primitive' types have been assigned an early and sometimes a prehistoric date. The 'Primitive types,' however, are as frequent at Mohenjo-Daro in the third millennium B.C. as they are in the Ganges Valley, etc., from the Śunga to the Gupta period, *i.e.*, roughly, before and during the first half of the first millennium A.D. and their number is not less to-day, made as they are by the potters and women in the villages of Bengal, Bihar, etc."



Chapter Six

METALS

THE knowledge of metallurgy is both old and widespread in India. Metallic vessels were known in the R̥g Vedic times; and subsequently, in the classical and mediæval periods, copper, brass and bronze objects were in universal use, as they are at the present day.

The manufacture of domestic articles and jewellery in precious metals like gold and silver has always been limited in Bengal. The uses of copper and brass, however, are almost endless; and the articles and images fashioned in these metals are usually elegant, although they are sometimes curious and grotesque.

1. MATERIALS

Copper is still considered to be the purest of all metals; and until recently ritual objects were entirely made of this metal. Now-a-days, however, for domestic purposes, brass is preferred, although vessels of this metal are sometimes used in rituals. As it is difficult to keep brass clean and polished, a new alloy ((*kānsā*) has come into common use. It is bell-metal or white brass made of copper and tin, mixed in the proportion of about 7 : 2. Brass is an alloy compound of copper and zinc in the proportion of 5 : 4 or 5 : 3, but these may vary from place to place.

2. METHOD OF MANUFACTURE

Brass, bell-metal and copper objects are manufactured by means of two methods : the *cire-perdu* process, and hammering.



3. CIRE-PERDU

In the *cire-perdu* method, which is being widely practised in India from ancient times, a model is first made with clay to which sand is added and also jute fibre or paddy chaff in order to give it strength. It is then coated with a layer of bees-wax which is well smoothed; and is then daubed with a mixture of reed ash and earth. A thin metal tube is placed at each end of the waxed model, and the whole is then encased in layers of clay and *bhuṣi* or husks. When the model is thoroughly dried, it is heated in a slow fire. The melted wax is drained through the lower tube. Molten metal is then poured through the upper end into the space left by the wax. When the metal becomes cool, the shell of clay is carefully peeled off; and, before polishing, the cast object is worked with files or chisels. The earthenware core is then removed.

4. HAMMERING

According to the second method, broken pieces of metal are melted in earthenware crucibles (*muci*) by means of wood, coal or charcoal fire. The molten mass is then poured into moulds; and cooled with salt water. Each ingot is used to make a single utensil. It is heated and beaten upon anvils into sheets. The expanded sheets are then cut to suitable sizes and are again hammered; the alternate process of heating and beating continues until the sheet metal acquires the desired form. Having worked the utensil over with a chisel and a file, the object is polished with cocoanut and jute fibres soaked in oil.

5. PĀN

Pān is used as soldering material. It is largely composed of brass scrap and borax (*Sohāgā*). Two sheets of brass are dovetailed into one another and beaten flat, and then soldered with the *Pān* compound.



6. DECORATION

The necessity of a thorough daily cleansing of all domestic utensils by scouring with sand and mud makes raised decoration unnecessary. The only decoration applied to these vessels, whether cast or hammered, is by means of incised designs.

The gracefully shaped pitchers (*Kalsi*), betel-nut cutters (*Jānti*), small jugs (*Ghaṭi* or *Lotā*), betel-holders (*Dābar-bāṭā*), bird cages (*Khāncā*), and toilet boxes are notable examples of the work of the Bengali metal workers. These articles are incised with floral and linear designs, fish and bird motif, and figures of divinities. The ornamentation is incised with chisels, making bold, unbroken, or dotted lines.

For the purpose of ritual ceremonies, the following articles are in universal use, and are particularly important aesthetically. Ornamental copper plates (*Puṣpapātras*) of different sizes are used for holding flowers and other offerings. *Pañcapradīps*, temple lamps, are of infinite variety: the most characteristic are the standing lamps in the form of a lady, holding in both hands five shallow bowls which are used as lamps. These temple lamps are waved before the divine image. Bells called *Ghaṇṭās* are of the ordinary bell shape. The handle is decorated with foliage or linear devices ending in a bird finial, usually a *Garuḍa* or *Hanumān* figure, the vehicular manifestation of Viṣṇu. These are rung each morning and evening in the temple; and at the time of worship. Tray stands, of which the main motif is a boldly modelled bull or a peacock, are used for holding votive offerings. The latter object is closely akin to the Nepalese style of brass and bell-metal work.²²

Often the huge brass chariots (*Rathas*) are also profusely decorated with human and animal motifs, illustrating mythological and social themes.



The brass workers do not use any tracing or pattern. They rely on a small hammer held in one hand and an iron graver in the other. This traditional workmanship in metal is handed down from father to son; and their instinctive sense is shown in the continuity of pattern and design over a great period of time. This is clearly revealed in the decoration applied to ritual objects. The workman plies his craft sure of himself; and the designs and patterns of several hundred years ago are faithfully worked to-day.

7. THE INFLUENCE OF CANE WORK TECHNIQUE

Cane work technique as applied to metal is illustrated in objects as rice-bowls, lamps, incense-burners, and village gods and goddesses, particularly of West Bengal. These archaic metal figures are generally used for rituals, although in many instances they have lost their original significance and are now used as children's toys. Spirals and parallel bands are used to denote hands and feet and for decorative purposes generally. For eyes and breasts metal pellets are hammered into the body of the figure. Weaving and reef knots in metal are also employed with extraordinary cunning. The elephant figure on the rice-bowls, the God Gaṇeśa and the Goddess Kālī (?) show fine examples of this technique.

8. PRIMITIVE ORIGIN

This method of brass working suggests a primitive origin. It is believed that the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons have absorbed and assimilated, within their folds, many forms of fetishes and icons belonging to earlier and primitive cults. And, of these fetish forms, non-Aryan in origin, many having failed to attain the status of Aryan images, have been tolerated as *Grāmya devatās* or *Kula devatās* ("village deities or tribal gods" and family "lares and penates.") The plastic conception of the images has dispensed with iconographical and



anatomical rules, each artist being at liberty to evolve new forms and shapes. Being no longer under the *Śāstric* discipline, he follows his own aesthetic vision and innate sense of form.

These figures "appear to have originated as a result of close relationship between magical beliefs and mythological thinkings,"²³ giving evidence of a sense of animation, which is probably symbolic of a primitive, spiritual urge. The remarks of Gangoly²⁴ about the tradition of the Rājput metal figures as "a vernacular dialect of an old Indian sculpture-language which may perhaps be older than the Aryan civilization of India"—are equally applicable in the present instance.

This metal work is still the monopoly of craftsmen known as *Jādu-Paṭuās* (magic-painters), who were originally metal workers but have now taken up painting.²⁵



Chapter Seven

BASKETRY

1. MATERIALS

BASKETRY and matting are made practically in all districts of Bengal. The materials used for their manufacture are flexible creepers (Latās), Bamboo (Bāñś), reeds (Khāgrā), grasses (Hogla), palm and date-palm leaves (Tālpātā and Khejarpātā). The old and tough shoots of plants are used especially for this purpose.

2. PREPARATION

Great care and skill are necessary for the preparation of the material for basket-making. The quality of the finished product depends largely on the material used. Canes, bamboos, etc., are split and then subdivided and twisted until the desired warp or weft is obtained. The delicacy of the products resulting from these operations has been aptly described in the proverbial Bengali saying that these "could be rubbed on the eye without hurting."²⁶

The finished strands are then buried in muddy-water, preferably under hyacinths, for a few days. Apart from giving durability, this process is an additional protection against the ravages of wood beetles. The natural colour of the material is changed, or modified by dyeing it in vegetable colours. The juice of the Gāb fruit is in universal use for producing a nut brown shade in baskets.

The principal technique of basket-making is that they may be either woven or coiled. The woven type is of a definite pattern made



up of strands of warp and weft. The warp is arranged in a more or less fixed position, whilst the weft crosses and recrosses it ; and is interwoven singly or in pairs. The composition of the basket and its decorative designs and patterns, depend on the width, colour, and other features of the weaving materials, as well as on the methods of weaving. The principal types of woven baskets made in Bengal are chequerwork, twilledwork, wickerwork, and twinedwork, each in several varieties.

3. CHEQUERWORK

In chequerwork, warp and weft are of similar thickness and width. The weaving is simple, each strand passing alternately over one another. When the weaving is close, the chequer patterns are of equal and similar size. If the warp is of one colour and the weft of another, a chequerboard pattern is produced. Sometimes the colour contrast depends on the quality of the material, particularly with wefts and warps of palm and date-palm leaf strips. In the process of drying, these young leaves have a satin-like glossiness.

The relative width of the strands, their angle at intersection, the use of colour, and minor differences of technology, all result in variations in the manufacture of chequerwork basketry.

The bulk of the *Hoglā* (*Typha elephantina*) matting is made in chequerwork, but at times the patterns run obliquely, giving them the appearance of diagonal weaving.

4. TWILLEDWORK

According to this technique, the weft passes over and under two or more warps, producing a diagonal or endless variety of diaper patterns. Twilled work is often combined with chequerwork in Bengal. An excellent variety of twilledwork is produced by this process making use of coloured strands. By a skilful manipulation of the two sides of a splint, by using leaves of different kinds, or with dyed strands,



geometric patterns, frets, and other designs in straight lines are produced. Often double-walled (cane inside and bamboo twilledwork outside) *Lakṣmī*-caskets are covered with red cloth on which cowries are sewn in floral patterns.

5. WICKERWORK

This method is used for making baskets (*Jhuri*) in common use, especially of a heavy type. In wickerwork, the warp is thicker and less flexible than the weft. As a rule the weaving is simple, each weft passing alternately over and under the warp. The effect is that on the surface there appears a series of ridges. Wickerwork is usually of a coarse weave, but fine specimens also are found all over the province.

6. TWINEDWORK

In twinedwork, as in wickerwork, the warp is thicker and more rigid than the weft. The weft is used in twos and threes, and it is twisted in half-turns resulting in ply strands, twine or braid.

Several varieties of twinedwork : Plain, Diagonal, and Wrapped types are found principally in Bengal.

The method used in woven basketry, especially in twinedwork, can be properly understood only by a close and detailed study of the baskets manufactured in Bengal.

7. COILED BASKET WORK

In coiled basketry, the foundation is first laid by coiling the cane round a central core at the base. It is then built up spirally, gradually widening the diameter of each coil until the desired height and form is attained. Each spiral coil is fixed to one another by bamboo splints, making use of an awl. This method of fixing is peculiar to all districts of Bengal.



Coiled basketry varies in size and quality. There are delicately made coiled baskets that are used as jewel baskets, vermilion pots, and others may be as large as coarsely woven storage jars called *Dhāmās*.

8. BORDERS ON BASKETRY (*MUDIBHĀṄĀ*)

The borders of various baskets, however, are woven on a different and highly interesting technique. The finishing off processes in chequerwork, wickerwork and twilledwork, twinedwork, and coiledwork, vary considerably. The usual types of weaving are: three-strand warp border, wrapped warp border, border of three-strand braid, simple coil border, simple wrapped border and finally, fastened twine border. In some instances borders are fixed down to the basket by long cane strips.

There are different methods of foundation for the weaving. The simplest form is to start from the bottom, arranging four warp stems in pairs and crossing them at the centre. As the weaving becomes more complex, stems increase to sixteen in number, crossing in groups of four at the centre. A widespread custom in Bengal is to give what Mason calls a "kick" to the bottom of the basket, thus forming a concave inside.

9. ORNAMENTATION (*NAKṢĀ*)

For ornamentation, many geometrical designs, foliage patterns, and, in rare instances, human and animal forms, depend upon the structure and colouring of the different strands. Coloured ornamentation is done by employing material of natural colour, use of dyed materials, and addition of beads, cowries and other ornamental objects. The most striking artistic effect is obtained by simple lines, bends, spirals and geometric designs. These are adapted to the weaver's fancy and to the general form of the different objects. The



design of the basket is modified by breaking, bending and setting the material at different angles.

The degree of fineness of the workmanship is shown in the variety of baskets, particularly *Peṭārās* (oval boxes), *Jhāmpis* (oblong caskets), *Phul-sājis* (flower baskets), *Kulās* (winnowing fans), *Cālunis* (sieves), *Māthāls* (Sun-hats), *Dhāmās* (measure bowls), and fishing traps.

10. DECORATION OF THATCHED CEILINGS

The decoration of thatched ceilings displays a unique craftsmanship. The beauty of the curvilinear roof of the Bengali cottage architecture is renowned. The old literature of Bengal is full of descriptive references to its architectural beauties.²²

The framework of the ceiling is made of bamboo and coloured strips, producing chequerboard, diagonal, spiral, diamond and zig-zag patterns. The *Gokhurā* (like slough of cobra) *Jāpco* (intertwined) knots of the ceilings as well as knots used for the *Mukhpāth* (eaves) are of high artistic excellence. As Dutt²³ remarks, "vitality and beauty are combined in a most wonderful manner in the strength of the bamboo frame and of the cane rope-work on the one hand, and the variety and originality of the decorative design of the painted strips of cane, on the other."

11. MATTING

Mats are woven of bamboo, reeds, grasses, cane and strips of palm and date-palm leaves. Bamboo mats called *Darmā* are manufactured in large quantities in Eastern Bengal and are used as walls of houses. Artistically two kinds of mats are noteworthy: those made of *Mādur* grass (*Cyperus tegetum*, and *Cyperus Pangorie*) and those made of *Śitalpāti* grass (*Maranta dichotoma*).



In the Midnapur district, fine mats known as *Maślandas* are made from *Mādur* grass, after having been first steeped in water for twenty-four hours, and then stripped according to the required thickness, and dyeing red. *Kuśāsanās* are made similarly from *Eragrostis cynosyroides*, a kind of grass known as *Kuśa* growing on high land and cut in Bengali months of *Bhādra* and *Aswin* (August-September). The grass is placed for four or five days in a room and is then spread out, dried and woven.

Mats of an excellent quality called *Śitalpāṭis* are made of grass, especially in Eastern Bengal. This grows in wild abundance in damp and marshy places. The superior quality of *Śitalpāṭi* is judged by its gloss and its delicacy of texture. It is famous both for high class quality of its work, and its ornamental (*naḥsā*) weaving. In general, the decoration is limited to chequerboard, diagonal, spiral, zig-zag and leaf (*Kalkā*) pattern, and also human and animal figures which illustrate mythological and social stories.

The industry is entirely in the hands of women. "Parents receive a heavy compensation from the men who marry their daughters, the amount being proportioned to the skill in making *Śitalpāṭi* mats."²⁰ Figured *Śitalpāṭi* mats made in the districts of Sylhet and Faridpur are renowned for their fine workmanship and design. Mats ornamented with ivory strips and beads are also made in Sylhet.



Chapter Eight

WOODWORK

1. WOODWORKER

ACCORDING to the Sanskrit tradition, the worker in wood is called a "*Sūtradhar*," or "one who holds the string." He is the principal exponent in Bengal of craftsmanship in wood and is an important member of the village community. Woodworkers are constantly mentioned in the *R̥g Veda* and subsequent literature, particularly the *Jātākas*.

2. PREPARATION

Both the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* and the *Śilpa-śāstra* (a treatise on art) give full directions with regard to the season and the manner of felling trees, the seasoning of the wood, and the manufacture of various articles from wood. The tree is to be cut down only when the sap has dried up. Trees growing on burial places and burning grounds, or on consecrated lands, are considered unsuitable for the manufacture of domestic and ritual objects as well as those with withered tops or growing by the road side. To all intents and purposes, the same traditional principles are observed by the local woodworkers of to-day.

3. OBJECTS

Owing to climatic conditions, the large bulk of the wood-carvings of Bengal have fallen into decay. The extant examples are to be found in architectural woodwork, chariots, cars (*Rathas*), and



'elephant-lion-seats' (*Gaja-siṃhāsanas*) or bed-steads, and bull-posts (*Bṛṣakāṣṭhas*) in various parts of the country. Besides these, wooden dolls and toys, masks, vessels, musical instruments and boat building form an important wood-working industry all over the province.

Carved and ornamental pillars as well as those of a simpler form are widely found in Bengal. Capitals or brackets are made with foliage or tasselled designs, often massed one above the other. They are sometimes provided with lateral struts carved with figures of horse-men, elephants, women or wrestlers. Exquisite wood carvings appear also on friezes, door-posts, lintels and window frames, illustrating such social and mythological stories as the barber and his wife, dancing women, and Viṣṇu or Durgā in various incarnations.

Cars and chariots, in which images of gods and goddesses are carried in procession on sacred festivals, are most elaborate structures covered all over with mythological carvings. Similar designs are characteristic of thrones. Some of the best carvings in wood (e.g., mother and child), however, are in low head pieces mortised into bed-legs and projecting above the frame. The feet of the posts are frequently carved in the form of lions' paws or eagles' claws, and the end pieces of the throne are often shaped as alligators' heads (*Maṅkara-mukha*).

Of great interest are the wooden mortuary monuments known as "*Bṛṣakāṣṭh*" which are to be found all over the province. These are generally placed at the junction of three roads in order to commemorate the dead.

Usually a male or female human figure is carved at its base. In the centre, a sacred bull and on the top a *Śiva-līṅgam*, or an image of Hara-Pārvatī are fashioned out of solid wood. The *Śikhara* (upper part) is finished either by a carved pyramid or by pointed finials.

The woodwork of Bengal thus represents two styles: sculpture in the round, and relief work on the flat.

Wood-carvings, being originally painted in colour, have, inspite of years of neglect, maintained their original brilliance.



4. DOLLS AND TOYS

Wooden dolls and toys are treated with great economy of form and decoration. These are first hewn out of solid wood and then painted in different colours on a white background. The artist usually chooses bright colours in order to make the objects lively. Particular parts of the body are emphasised by bold strokes of the artist's brush. The treatment of line drawing is especially noteworthy and represents an old Bengali tradition. The colour scheme is made up of red, black and blue; and yellow forms the general groundwork. Usually lac varnish is applied to fix the colour.

In shape and form some of these wooden dolls remind one of the coffins in which Egyptian mummies were preserved. Male figures are rare among dolls.

5. MASKS

From time immemorial, masks have been associated with artificial faces worn by actors in folk dramas or by devotees, for exciting terror especially at Gambhirā festivals. Mask-dancing has been common in many religious festivals of Bengal, when masks are worn to represent gods and goddesses in human and animal forms. Generally half-masks, both coloured and plain, are to be seen in large numbers at these festivals. The wooden mask is usually coloured in red, black and yellow, enlivened by an intensely dramatic expression, fascinating and even frightening the spectators. The illusion is so real that the wearer appears, for the time being, the person whom the mask represents. The wearing of such masks and false garments can be correlated with similar primitive belief and custom in other parts of the world.

6. BOAT-BUILDING

Bengal is famous for the number and variety of its boats. A few centuries ago, ship-building reached a high degree of perfection;



and vivid descriptions of the construction of sea- or river-going vessels can be found in ancient Bengali literature,³⁰ especially in the *Manasā-Maṅgal* and *Chāṇḍi-Kāvya*.

Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Bābul (*Acacia arabica*), Sāl (*Shorea robusta*), Uri-ām (*Magnifera longipes*), Kadam (*Anthocephalus cadamba*), Jām (*Eugenia jambolara*), Gāb (*Diosphyros embryopteris*), Karai, Jārul (*Lagos troemia flosreginoe*), and Sundarī (*Heritiera littoralis*) are amongst the woods employed. The building of the boat is undertaken on an auspicious day after due consultation of the *Pañjikā* or astrological almanac.

The keel (*daurā*) is first laid and the ribs are then fastened in position by nails and bolts. The gunwale is fixed at the appropriate height by means of stringers (*galai*), and the sides of the boat are then built up by the Clinker method.

The bow of the vessel has an important decorative function in boat-building, and differs from one vessel to another. In ancient literature,³¹ references are made to seven types of bows, representing lions, buffaloes, serpents, elephants, tigers and birds, especially *Mayūrs* (peacocks) and *Śukas* (mythical birds); and the ships were accordingly called "*Mayūrapaṅkhi*," "*Śukapaṅkhi*," etc.

Both sterns and bows are sometimes decorated with an 'eye' or a lotus motif. Each eye is fashioned in brass, and nailed high up at either end. The form is conventional, surmounted by a symmetrical eyebrow and ending up with an alligator form.

Amongst the best known boats plying in Bengal rivers are small passenger and fishing boats (*Diṅghis*), rowing and racing skiffs (*Bāicer-naukā*), large fishing boats (*Mechho-bāicārī*), travelling houseboats and ceremonial barges (*Bajrā*), and cargo carriers (*Pānsī*). Sampans, obviously of Chinese origin, as well as sea-going vessels are still built in Bengal, particularly in Chittagong district. The latter are usually profusely decorated and ornamented.



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ABBREVIATIONS

BSPP	...	<i>Baṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣad Patrikā.</i>
IAL	...	Indian Art and Letters.
IHQ	...	Indian Historical Quarterly.
JAC	...	Journal of Arts and Crafts.
JIAI	...	Journal of the Indian Art and Industry.
JISOA	...	Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.
MASB	...	Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
VBQ	...	Viswa-Bhārati Quarterly.



DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATES

FRONTISPIECE

- Left* Coloured wooden female doll, Birbhum District. Limbs shown in colour only ; black and red lines drawn with steady strokes on yellow body colour, and sky blue on the skirt.
- Right* Another wooden female doll. Coloured on a white coating, Hooghly District. Lines bold. General shape of the figure denoting volume.

PLATE I

1. Circular Ālipanā, Birbhum District. Central starting point provided by spiral arrangement. Foot marks representing the goddess Lakṣmī, shown in four corners.

PLATE II

2. Tārā-Vrata Ālipanā, Faridpur District. Drawn with the solution of ground rice. On the top the sun with the matted hair flanked by Śiva-Durgā motif, in the middle the whole universe with sixteen stars and on the bottom the moon and also the earth representing the seat of the devotee. Right side, various kinds of ornaments and household goods.

PLATE III

3. Māghmandal-Vrata Ālipanā, Dacca District. Drawn with five coloured powders. The main burnt-brick colour used in drawing the sun at the top, the first circle of the central universe (*Mandal*) and the seat of the devotee. Left side, toilet objects and ornaments. Right side, a cloth, a *Mādār* tree, a Lakṣmī-casket, a running horse, and a pair of bangles.



PLATE IV

4. Toy or a cult object. Probably a dog, Birbhum District. Hand-made terra-cotta, marked by incised lines.
5. Toy object, horse mounted on wheels, Mymensingh District. Hand-made terra-cotta.

PLATE V

6. Hand-made terra-cotta dolls, young girls, Mymensingh District. Massive body, ornamentation by incised lines. Indian red colour secured by burning the figure under the fire of husk. Pellets used to mark eyes, lips deeply indented.
7. Sun-baked clay female dolls, Faridpur District. Hand-made. Completely coloured with a lacquer coating. Colour scheme divided into two portions—black on the upper part and Indian red on the lower.

PLATE VI

8. Terra-cotta doll, a milkmaid shaped by hand with the help of a wheel, Birbhum District. Drapery, ornaments and eyes painted with Indian red and black on silver coating. Left hand embracing the child and right one touching the tip of the pitcher—its globular portion forming part of the face of the figure.
9. Similar terra-cotta male doll mounted on an elephant, Birbhum District.

PLATE VII

10. Mother and child, Mymensingh District. Hand-made terra-cotta doll or a cult object. Ornaments executed by instrumental pressure.

PLATE VIII

11. Wooden female dolls, Kalighat. Painted with yellow, red and black—yellow being the body-colour and the cloth red. Free from angles and no sign of legs.



PLATE IX

12. Wooden female dolls, Burdwan District. Painted on a white coating. Lines bold.

PLATE X

13. Owl from Burdwan District. Painted toy, curved out from bamboo.
14. Wooden female doll, Tippera District. Executed luxuriously with patches of colour over an underlying painting of darker hue.

PLATE XI

- 15-16. Elephants and horses mounted on wheels, Tippera District. Painted wooden toys, wheels and pedestals not coloured—completely left in natural condition.

PLATE XII

17. Wooden gate-keeper of a Ratha, Khulna District. Painted with yellow and nut-brown. Grotesque in form.

PLATE XIII

18. *Bṛṣakāṭh* (wooden-post) representing a male figure in relief, Kalighat. Bull and phallic emblem carved out in complete round.
19. *Bṛṣakāṭh* representing a female figure, Natun-Bazar, Calcutta. Painted on a white coating with yellow and black.

PLATE XIV

20. Miniature *Bṛṣakāṭh* representing a male figure, Sylhet District. Pyramidal crown on the head; eyes and nose elongated and hands folded.

PLATE XV

21. Moulded terra-cotta female dolls, Faridpur District. Each doll showing a distinct posture by different attitude of hands. Lower portions massive and draperies shown by bold strokes of black colour.



22. Moulded terra-cotta horse and toys, Faridpur District. Painted with black, yellow and red on a white ground.
23. A sepoy and a monkey made of pith, Faridpur District. Primary colours—red and black. Different parts of the body joined with a torso. Flexible joints.

PLATE XVI

24. Moulded terra-cotta male doll in a meditative pose, Faridpur District. Kneeling posture with two hands resting on each knee. Scarf-like dress covering shoulders and hands.

PLATE XVII

25. A female droll figure, Birbhum District. Moulded terra-cotta doll. Denoting fertility, painted with yellow and black.

PLATE XVIII

26. Terra-cotta Śaṣṭhi goddess, Birbhum District. Hand-made. Two children on her lap and two on her abdomen. Burnt under slow fire of husk and black colouring obtained from the smoke. Ornaments grooved and eyes perforated.

PLATE XIX

27. A hanging scroll from Birbhum District. Depicting *Kṛṣṇalīlā*. Upper scene—stealing of clothes of the milk-maids by Kṛṣṇa on a tree; clothes hanging on different branches and nude milkmaids begging for their garments. Middle scene—Kṛṣṇa seated on a chair under a tree, listening to the milkmaids. Lower scene—Kṛṣṇa as a milkman carrying *Dadhībhāṇḍas* (pots containing curd) with four milkmaids. Each scene separated by horizontal lines with vertical borders.

PLATE XX

28. Another panel of *Kṛṣṇalīlā* scene from the scroll mentioned above. Upper scene—mother Yasoda dressing her child Kṛṣṇa before setting out for pasture fields along with his playmates; lower scene—Kṛṣṇa as a head of the cowherds going to pasture field with flute in hand and cows in front.



PLATE XXI

29. Hanging scroll from Hooghly District. Depicting *Rāmlilā* scene—the exile of Rama. Dasarath lying on the floor smitten with grief and one of his queens, probably Kausalya, the mother of Rama, lying prone. One queen attending to the king and another bidding farewell to Rama and his party consisting of Lakṣmana and Sita in the middle. Figures shown in profile and designs of drapery distinguished from each other. Hair of the three figures of the party fashioned carefully. Leaf borders shown in four corners. Painted in Indian red, dark blue and yellow colours.

PLATE XXII

30. Another panel of *Rāmlilā* scene from the scroll mentioned above, depicting the return of Rama with his party. Headdress marked with leaves—the sign of exile. Rama and Lakṣmana dressed in trousers.

PLATE XXIII

31. Miniature painting, a male figure (Vaiṣṇava), Bankura District. Body shown in front but face invariably in profile. Stylised drapery and decoration. Body colours—Indian red and black.

PLATE XXIV

32. Another miniature painting representing a female figure (Vaiṣṇavi), Bankura District.

PLATE XXV

33. Bronze image of the goddess Kali (?), Murshidabad District. Supported by a stele, and below, a triangular pedestal. Upper hands made of ductile metal wires moving spirally and horizontally. Lower hands nailed to the breast. Pellets used for eyes, breasts and earrings. Bangles and necklaces resembling a cane, bamboo or wood prototype. *Yogāsana* pose and a cincture round the waist.



PLATE XXVI

34. Bronze goddess with an aureole, Murshidabad District. Left leg protruding from the main torso.

PLATE XXVII

35. Wooden rice-measure bowl plated with brass, Birbhum District. The main design representing a pair of interlocked pigeons. Head separated, body from neck to tail completely united. Each design demarcated below by a flower-like motif and on top by horizontal lines.
36. Another wooden rice-measure bowl plated with brass, Birbhum District. Main design demarcated by animal, fish motif, etc. Designs made of twisting ductile metal wires.

PLATE XXVIII

37. Cane basket, Faridpur District. Thin cane vertically laid across the body structure made of thick canes arranged spirally. Spiral knots placed separately between the crosswise weaving.
38. Lakshmi-casket made of cane and cowrie, Rajshahi District. Ornamentations shown by juxtaposition of cowries. In the first and third lines, cowries arranged vertically and in the middle horizontally. Flowers made by cowries placed one after another in a cyclic order. Cowries stitched with thread on a red cloth mounted on bamboo structure.

PLATE XXIX

39. Cane work on ceiling of a thatched cottage, Birbhum District. Cane stripes interlaced with crosswise bamboo frames resulting in various patterns. Coloured in red, black and green.

PLATE XXX

40. *Kānthā* used as wrapper for body, Bogra District. Woven with running and chain stitch with coloured threads taken from the borders of worn-out saris covered with peacocks,



elephants, horses, tigers and human figures. Betel-leaf borders ending with alternating diagonals. Donee's name as well as the address of the maker written in Bengali script in the middle chamber.

PLATE XXXI

41. *Kānthā* for covering articles, Jessore District. Smaller and square in size. Central flower encircled by different creepers covering the major field. In four corners, embroidered trees, elephants, flowers, Rathas, etc., with an elaborate border. Embroidered threads running irregularly.
42. Pillow case made of cloth, Jessore District. Applique works. Patterns produced by different layers of coloured clothes stitched to the ground. Each flower separated from the other by creeper-like design ending with T-and V-shaped points. Zig-zag pattern in the middle.

PLATE XXXII

- 43-44. Two pillow-covers, Birbhum District. Rectangular in size. Flower and creeper designs being always evident. Stitches in the ground controlling the shape and size of the designs.

PLATE XXXIII

45. "Ria" textile, Tippera District. Designs produced by the use of warp and weft threads mainly of yellow and red colours. Same effect on both sides.

PLATE XXXIV

46. Clay mask made in a mould, Mymensingh District. Used either in religious rites or in dramatic representations. Above the forehead one hole and two others on the ears for passing strings or cords to fasten it to the face. Simple colouring.
47. Another wooden mask, Faridpur District. Made of Neem wood.



PLATE XXXV

48. *Sikā* (string-holder) used to hang earthen pots, plates and beddings, Jessore District. Made of jute and coloured rags. Floral designs embroidered with knitted knots.

PLATE XXXVI

49. Earthen *Manasā-ghat*, Faridpur District. Four hooded snakes joined separately with the pitcher.
 50. Earthen *Manasā-ghat*, Backerganj District. Anthropomorphic representation of the goddess *Manasā* encircled with seven hooded snakes on the top and below a swan. Coloured with yellowish red, blue and black.

PLATE XXXVII

51. Sugar cake, a bird, Faridpur District.
 52. Mould of a mango cake, Jessore District. Incised works on a stone-plate.

PLATE XXXVIII

53. Earthen *Lakṣmi-sarā*, Faridpur District. Smaller size. Floral motifs on the top and below the figure of an owl—mount of the goddess.
 54. Earthen *Lakṣmi-sarā*, Dacca District. Bigger size. On the top, *Kṛṣṇa* with his consort *Lakṣmi*. The deity in the middle of a chariot with her two attendants flanked by two peacocks. Strong colouring.

PLATE XXXIX

55. Earthen betel-vessel, Birbhum District. Crosswise designs with black colour on silver coating.

PLATE XL

56. Earthen pitcher tempered with sand, Birbhum District. Horizontal wavy lines supported by cross-hatched design on a red wash. Free-hand drawing.



PLATE XLI

57. Earthen fire-pan, Faridpur District. Coated with a slip of red extract from unripe "Gāb" fruits.
58. Earthen hooka-stand, Faridpur District. Coated with a slip of red ochre.

NOTE

A painted Lakṣmi-sara mounted on the cover, Faridpur District. The symbol of *Basundharā* (the earth) reproduced from *Ālipanā* drawing on fly leaf.



IMPORTANT FAIRS (*MELAS*)

WHERE OBJECTS OF FOLK ARTS AND CRAFTS OF BENGAL ARE
EXHIBITED ANNUALLY

Agartala, Tippera State; *Doler Melā*
Ayash, Birbhum District; *Māghi Purnimā Melā*
Bagri Krishnagar, Midnapur District; *Doler Melā*
Bakreswar, Birbhum District; *Śivarātri Melā*
Bamandanga, Rangpur District; *Jagaddhatri-Pūjā Melā*
Baruipur, 24-Parganas; *Rāsh Melā*
Begunbari, Mymensingh; *Rather Melā*
Cooch-Bihar, Cooch-Bihar State; *Rāsh Jātrā Melā*
Dacca, Dacca District; *Janmāṣṭami Melā*
Darwani, Rangpur District; *5th Fālgun*
Dhamrai, Dacca District; *Chaitra Sankrānti Melā*
Dhubri, Goalpara District; *Brahmaputra—bathing Melā*
Gangasagar, 24-Parganas; *Gangasāgar Melā*
Gopinathpur, Bogra District; *Dole Purnimā Melā*
Hili, Dinajpur District; *Māgh Melā*
Iho, Malda District; January 18 to February 3
Jalpesh, Jalpaiguri District; *Śivarātri Melā*
Jatrapur, Khulna District; *Rather Melā*
Kalaskati, Backerganj District; *Kalaskāti Melā*
Kalighat, Calcutta; *Rāsh Jātrā Melā*
Kalimpong, Darjeeling District; *Kalimpong Melā*
Kandi, Murshidabad District; *Paush Sankrānti Melā*
Kantanagar, Dinajpur District; *Goṣṭha Melā*



- Kenduli, Birbhum District; *Paush Sankrānti Melā*
 Khetur, Rajshahi District; *Premtoli Melā*
 Koyepara, Chittagong District; *Rath Jātrā Melā*
 Langalband, Dacca District; *Aṣṭami-Snān Melā*
 Lohajang, Dacca District; *Chaitra Sankrānti Melā*
 Madhabpur, Sylhet District; First week of December
 Mahesh, Hooghly District; *Rather Melā*
 Mahisadal (Tamluk), Midnapur District; *Rather Melā*
 Manda, Rajshahi District; *Rāmnabami Melā*
 Matijharna (Rajmahal Hills), Santal Pargana; *Śivarātri Melā*
 Meher, Tippera District; *Kālī-Bāri Melā*
 Muniganj, Khulna District; *Bārūni Melā*
 Nabadwip, Nadia District; *Rāsh Jātrā Melā*
 Nalia, Faridpur District; *Māghi Purnimā Melā*
 Nekmardan, Dinajpur District; *Nekmardan Melā*
 Panjia, Jessore District; *Rather Melā*
 Purnia, Purnia District; January-February
 Ramnagar, Midnapur District; *Saraswati Melā*
 Ramrajatala, Howrah District; *Rāmnabami Melā*
 Rupganj, Jessore District; Tuesdays and Saturdays in *Baiśakh*
 Sachar, Tippera District; *Rather Melā*
 Santipur, Nadia District; *Rāsh Jātrā Melā*
 Saugor, 24-Parganas; *Paush Sankrānti Melā*
 Tarakeswar, Hooghly District; *Śivarātri Melā*
 Udhanpur, Burdwan District; *Paush Sankrānti Melā*
 Ullapara, Pabna District; Middle of *Śrāvan*
 Vinagar, Faridpur District; *Barūni Melā*



MAP OF BENGAL



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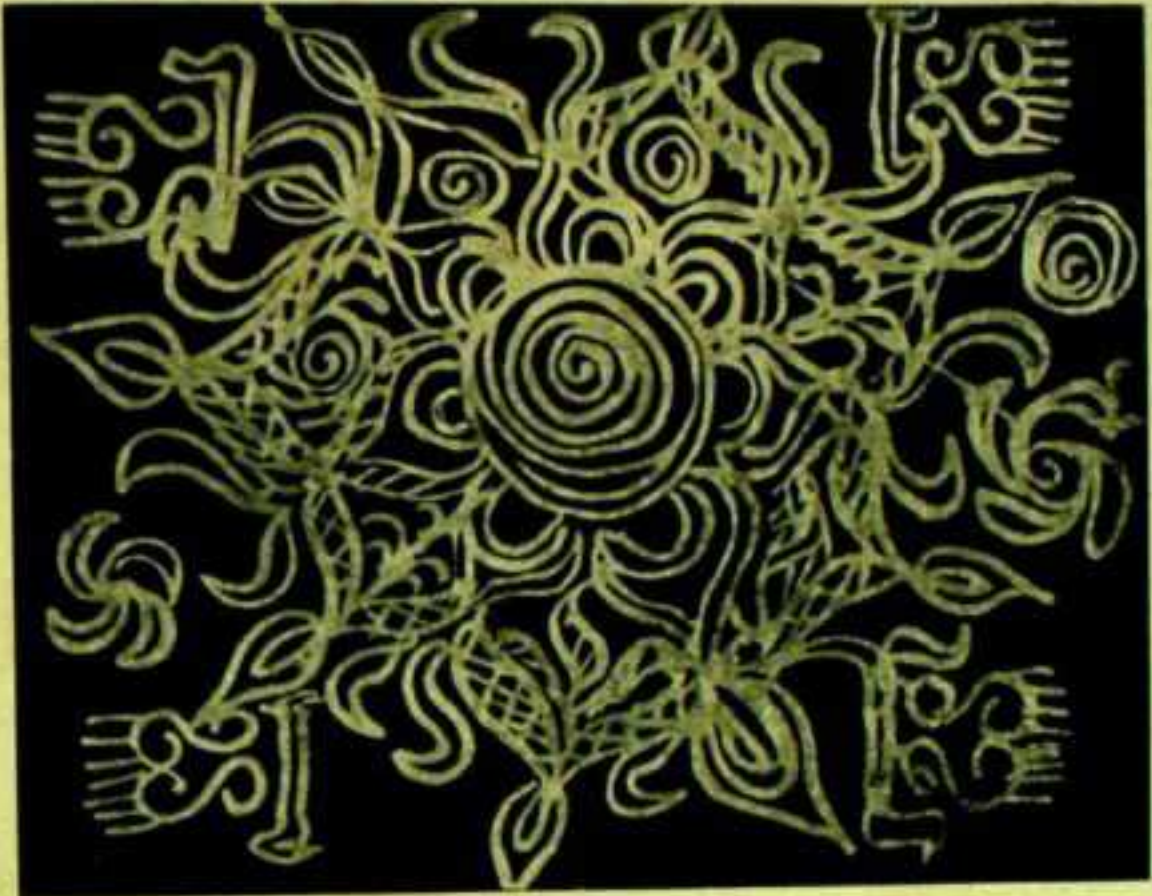
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PLATES

The object of art, as well as any other product, creates an artistic and beauty-enjoying public. Production thus produces not only an object for the individual, but also an individual for the object.

KARL MARX: *Critique of Political Economy.*



1. Circular Alipana, Birbhum.



2. Tara-Vrata Alipana, Faridpur



3. Maghmandal-Vrata Alipana, Dacca.



Above : 4. Terra-cotta dog (?), Birbhum

Below : 5. Terra-cotta horse mounted on wheels, Mymensingh



Above : 6. Terra-cotta female dolls, Mymensingh.

Below : 7. Sun-baked clay female dolls coated with lacquer, Faridpur



8. Terra-cotta female doll, Birbhum



9. Terra-cotta male doll mounted on an elephant, Birbhum



10. Terra-cotta doll (?) mother and child, Mymensingh



11. Painted wooden female dolls, Kalighat



12. Painted wooden female dolls, Burdwan



13. Painted toy made of bamboo,
an owl, Burdwan.



14. Painted wooden female
doll, Tippera.



Above : 15. Painted wooden toy, elephants mounted on wheels, Tippera

Below : 16. Painted wooden toy, horses mounted on wheels, Tippera



17. Painted wooden doll of a gate keeper
from Ratha, Khulna.



18. Bris-a-kat (wooden-post),
Kalighat



19. Painted Bris-a-kat
(wooden-post), Natun-bazar,
Calcutta



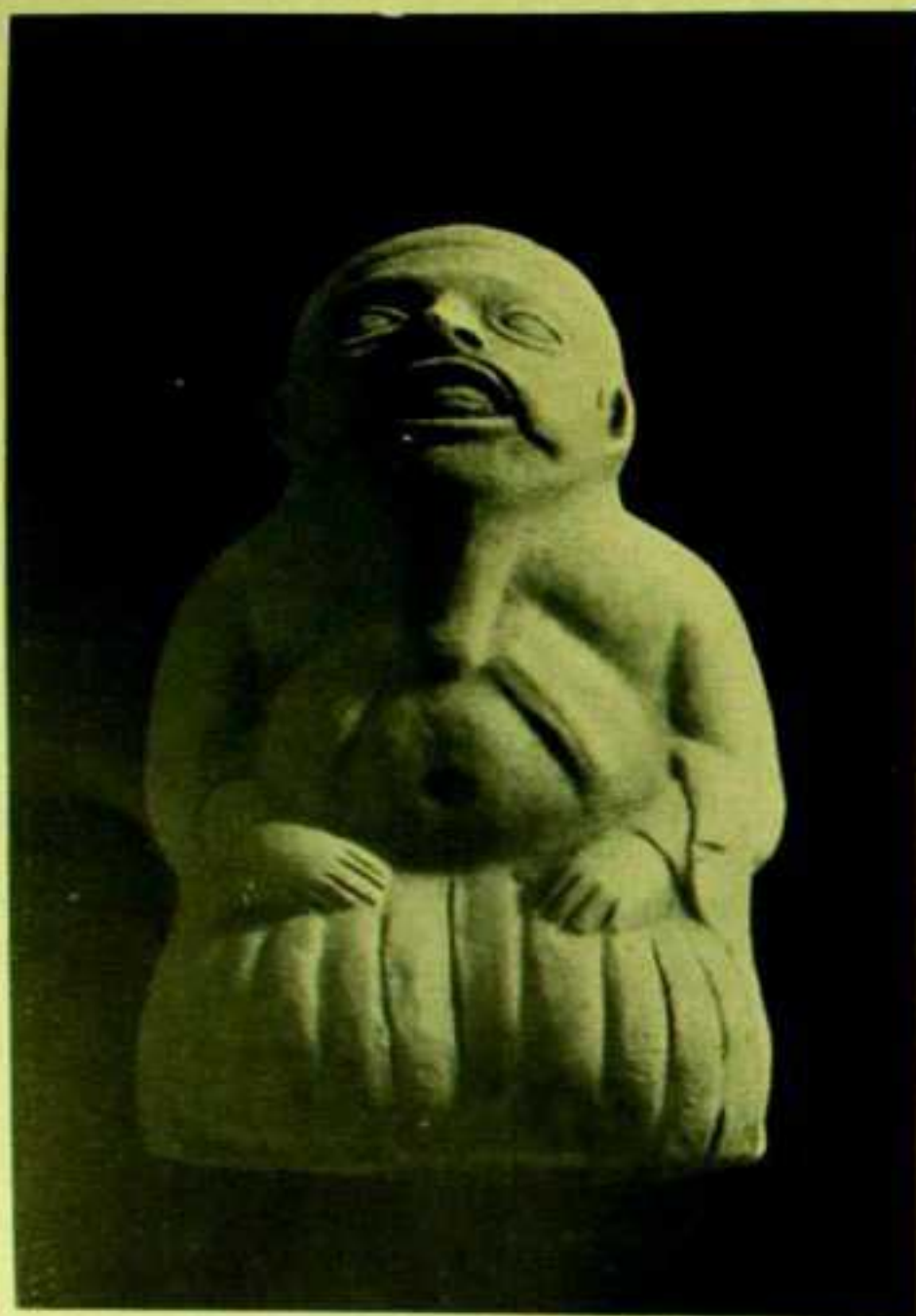
20. Miniature Brisa-kat (wooden-post), Sylhet



Above : 21. Terra-cotta female dolls, Faridpur

Below : Left—22 Terra-cotta toys, a horse and a bird, Faridpur

Right—23. Pith dolls, a sepoy and a monkey, Faridpur



24. Terra-cotta male doll in a meditative pose, Faridpur



25. Terra-cotta doli female figure, Birbhum.



26. Goddess Sasthi with four children on her lap, Birbhum



27. Scroll-painting, Krishnalila scene, Birbhum



28. Scroll-painting, Krishnalila scene, Birbhum



29. Scroll-painting, Ramlila scene, Hooghly



30. Scroll-painting, Ramlila scene, Hooghly



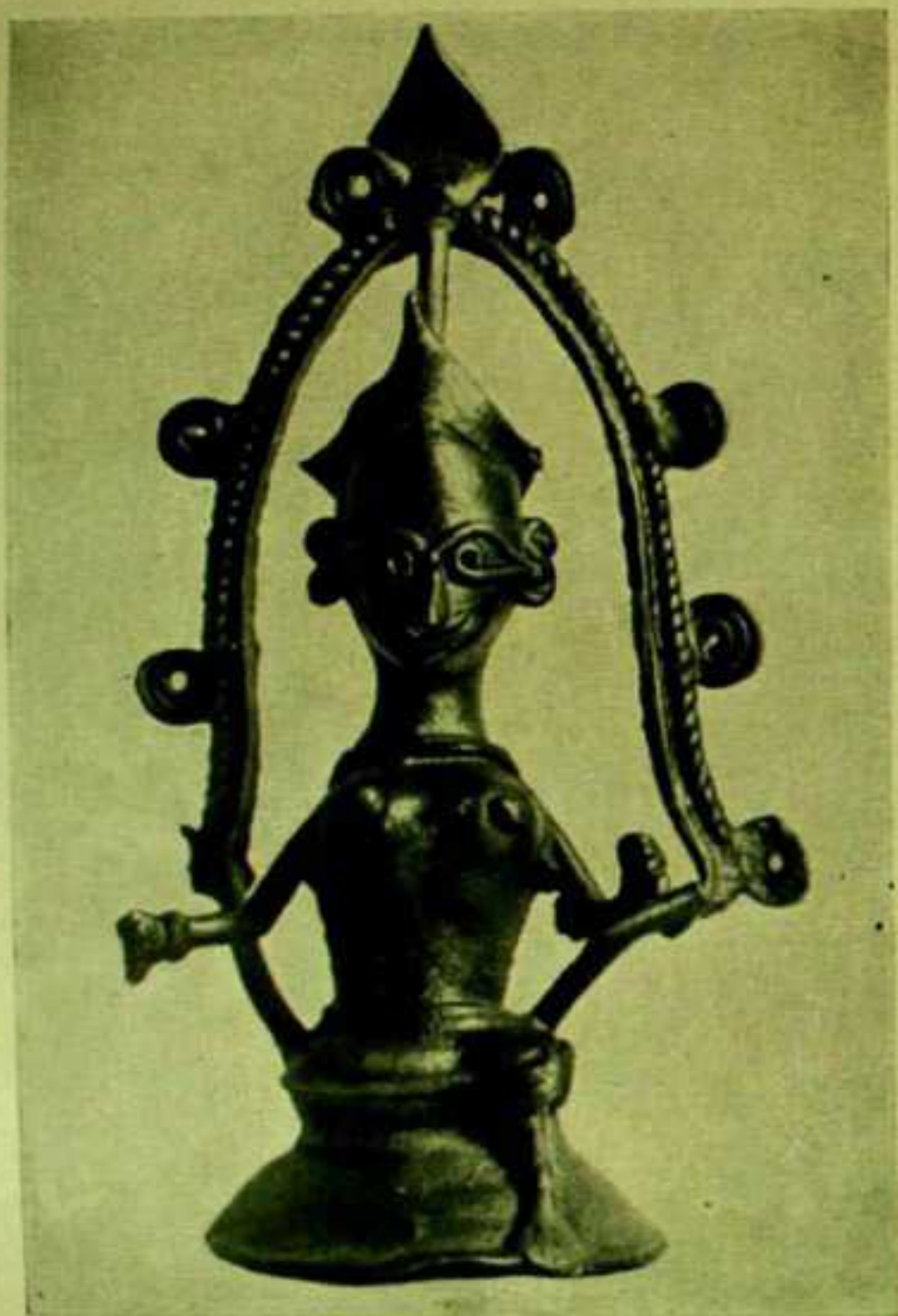
31. Miniature painting of a Vaisnava, Bankura.



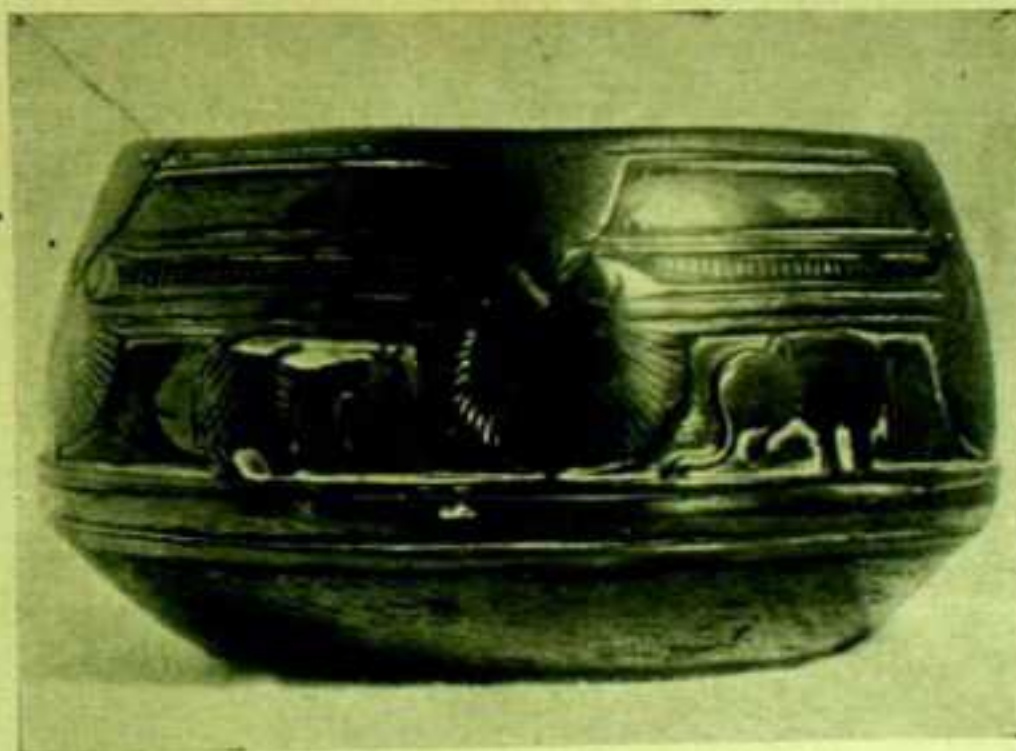
32. Miniature painting of a Vaisnavi, Bankura



33. Bronze image of the Goddess Kali (?), Murshidabad



34. Bronze Goddess, Murshidebad

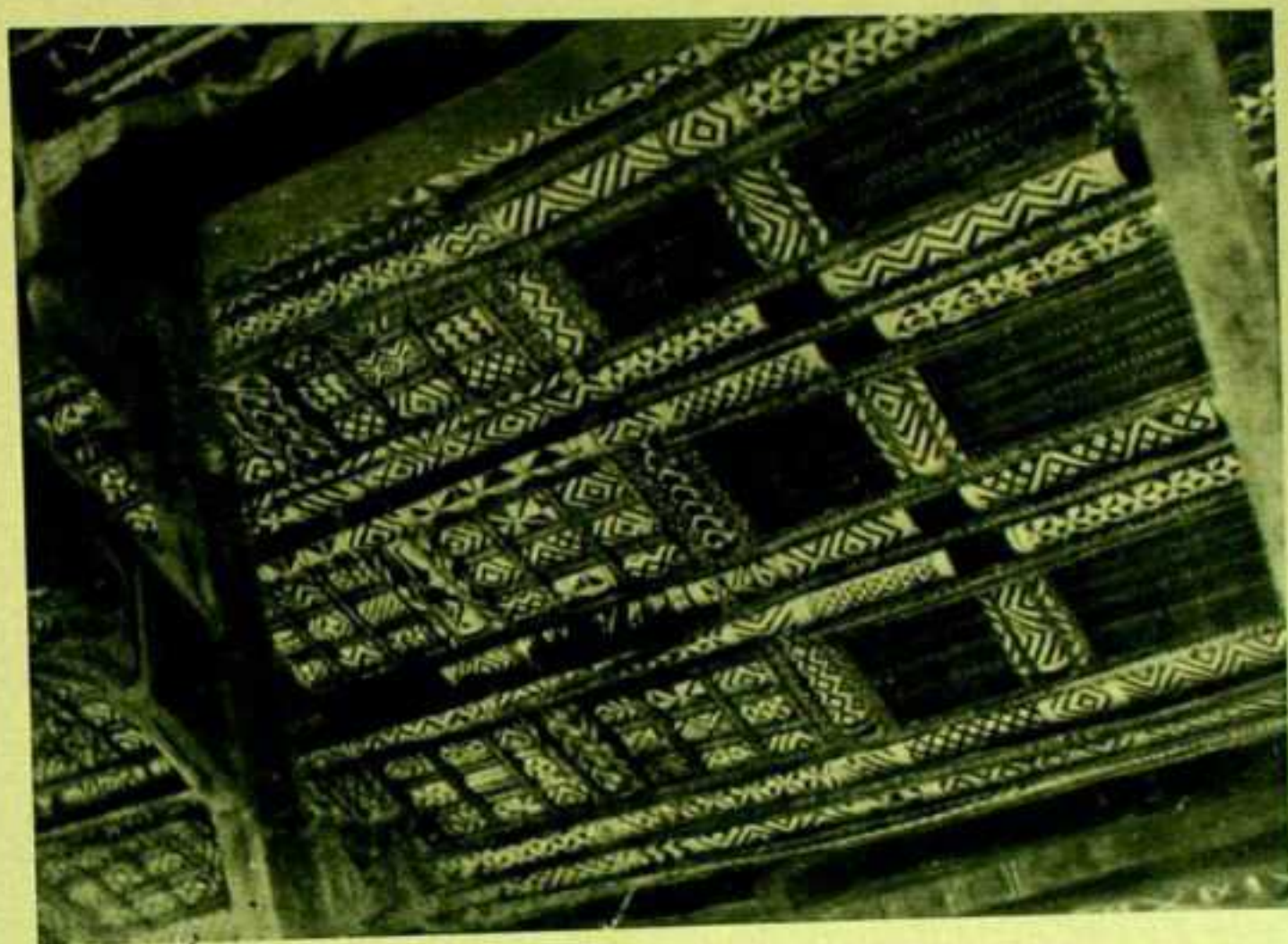


Above : 35. Wooden rice-bowl plated with brass, Birbhum
Below : 36. Wooden rice-bowl plated with brass, Birbhum



Above : 37. Cane basket, Faridpur

Below : 38. Lakami-casket made of cane and cowrie, Rajshahi



39. Cane work on ceiling of a thatched cottage, Birbhum



40. Kaniha, Bogra



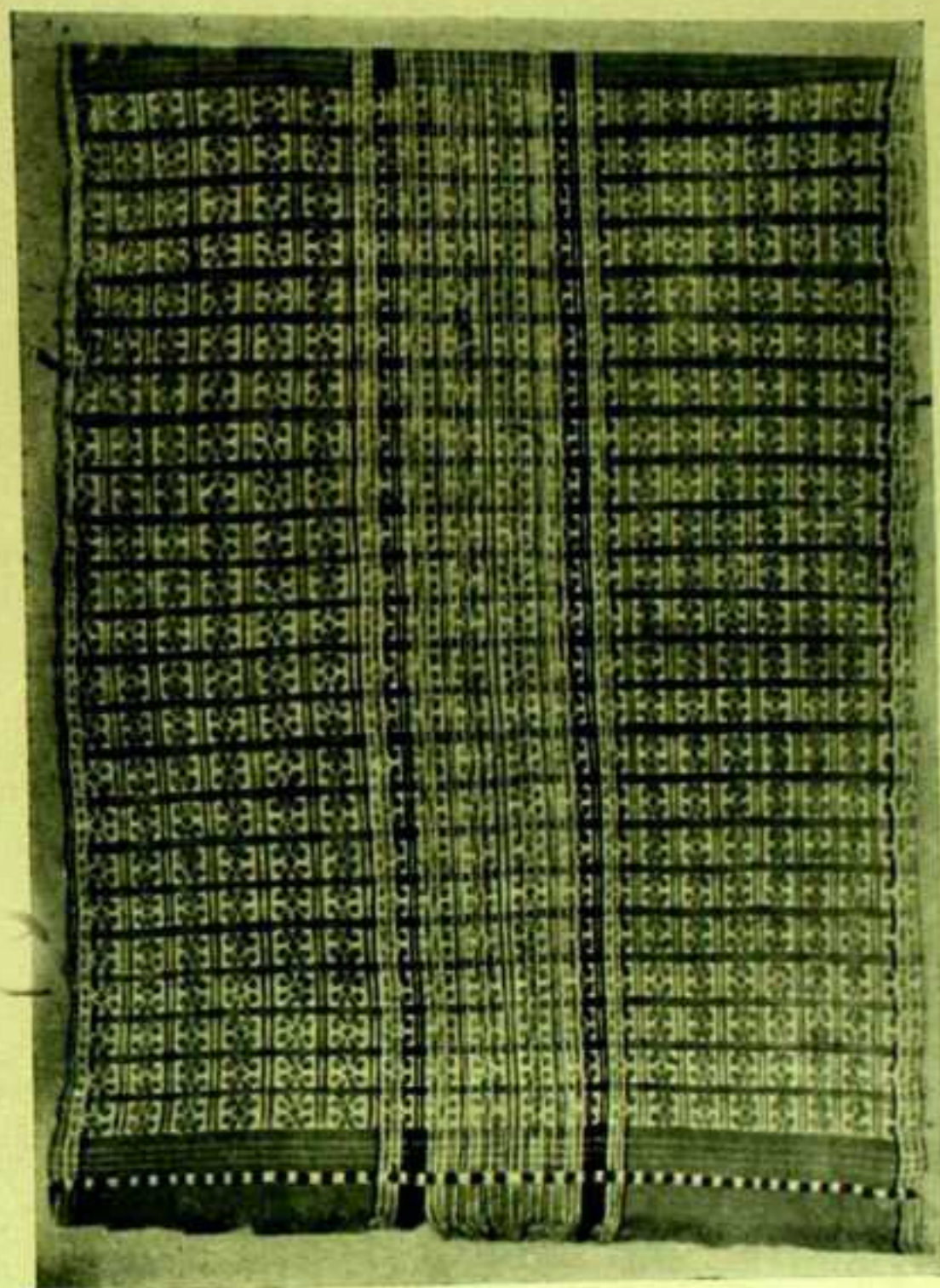
Above : 41. Kantha, Jessore
Below : 42. Pillow-case, Jessore



43. Kantha (pillow-cover), Jessore



44. Kantha (pillow-cover),
Birbhum



45. Ria textile, Tippera



Above : 46. Earthen mask, Mymensingh
Below : 47. Wooden mask, Faridpur



48. Sika, Jessore.



49. Manasa Ghat, Faridpur



50. Manasa Ghat (painted),
Backerganj

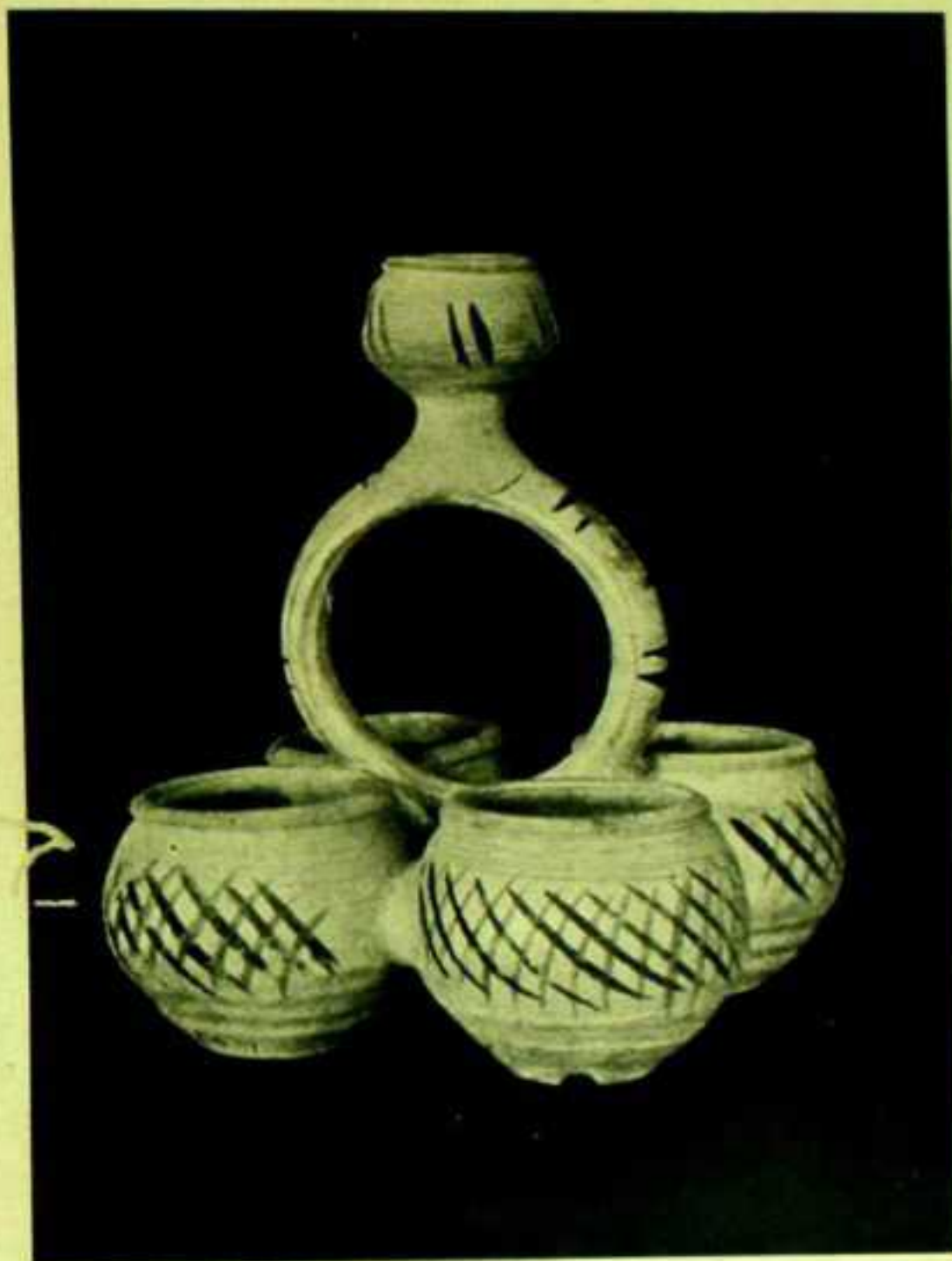


Above : 51. Sugar cake, a bird, Faridpur

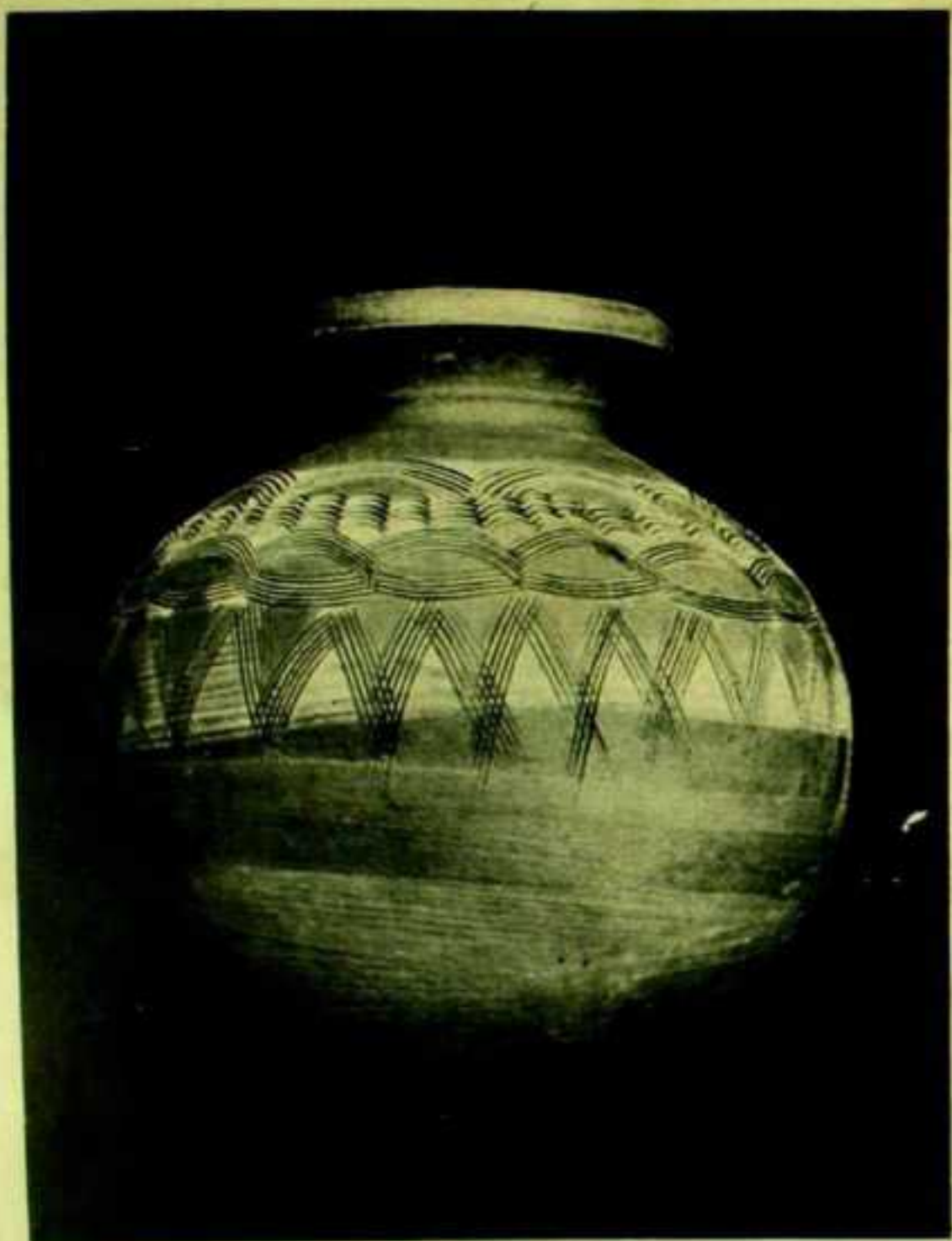
Below : 52. Mango cake-mould (stone-plate), Jessore



Above : 53. Laksmi-sara (earthen-plate), Faridpur.
Below : 54. Laksmi-sara (earthen-plate), Dacca.



55. Earthen betel-vessel, Birbhum



56. Earthen pitcher, Birbhum



Above : 57. Earthen fire-pan, Faridpur

Below : 58. Earthen hooka-stand, Faridpur